

Teachers' Skills to Create Positive Learning Environment and Collaboration with Parents in Public Schools

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate performance of teachers with regard to their capacity to create learning environment and collaboration with learners and parents. By using a questionnaire for teachers and interview protocol for students data was gathered from 39 female and 51 male teachers, along with 20 students, from 15 female and 21 male schools. Overall findings from teachers' questionnaire and students' who interviewed reflected that teachers' effort in creating positive learning environment with in classroom was not satisfactory. They did not involve students in teaching learning process. Generally they applied teacher centered teaching approaches. It was concluded that teachers were not taking care in creating conducive learning environment of the class. It was recommended that teachers may be trained to involve all of the learners in learning process so that they know how learners are progressing and hence learners will receive individual attention. It was recommended that teachers may be encouraged to identify strengths and weaknesses of learners and plan their instruction accordingly. Teachers need to be motivated to develop strong link with parents and communities for better collaboration and students support.

Key Terms: learning environment, collaboration and partnership, parents role, teachers standards, Pakistan

Introduction

According to Cornell (2002) concept of learning environment in 21st century requires maximum interaction and a sense of community within the classroom in order to ensure both formal and informal learning. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in collaboration with many organization working in education, health, art and civic established the Whole Child initiative which encourages schools and its relevant communities to work together to create such an environment which help students to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) opined learning

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environment should help learners grow emotionally, physically, socially and academically (CASEL, 2007).

According to Quinn, Osher, Warger, Hanley, Bader, and Hoffman, (2000) researched on the space of the class where they recommend a defined space that lead the behavior of the students for variety of purposes. He mentioned that if there is a space for the students with problems in learning they should have some space to be relaxed and work productively. The arrangement of the seats should be defined and everyone should know his or her place as suggested by Rinehart (1991) also.

Review of Literature

Maintaining the attention level of the students is obviously necessary for effective learning and teaching. Distractions are internal and external. As far as the external distractions are concerned, they are mainly visual and auditory in nature. The teachers should try their best to minimize them to the extent possible (Quinn et al., 2000. Students' early life part is mostly spent in the schools. They learn from their teachers and from their class-fellows. Later on when they grow up, they exhibit what they learnt in schools. Their behavior and attitudes are affected by the school environment. They express their feelings and thoughts in practical life situations after being trained and educated in the schools. This scenario laid much stress on the shoulders of the teachers. The teachers' responsibility can best be met when they are able to produce an effective learning environment in their teaching classrooms.

Collaboration and Partnership

There is a need of strong sharing of information between parents and teachers. The more sharing between them would results in more success on the part of the students. The students can realize as a

result of collaboration between the parents and teachers. Effective communication between the parents and teachers dictates school helps the learners and their families. The school communicates the progress made by the students which will definitely enhance the performance of the students (Peter, Seeds, Goldstein, & Coleman, 2008).

School should include parents in the process of decision making. The parents who are given opportunities to take part in the process of decision making actually receive the feeling of ownership which definitely enhance their personal interest in their own kids' education. They are more supportive when they come know the intricacies of the running of the school. The involved parents can provide access to other parents as well which enhances the performance of the school (Peter et al., 2008). Recent researchers focused on parental involvement, quality instructions, enhancing students' achievement, commitment of the community on the one hand, while on the other hand, studies have also been conducted upon the workload the teachers and administrators are bearing as a result of more responsibilities they have to shoulder in order to enhance the overall quality of education (Desforge & Abouchaar, 2003).

The researches have taken parental involvement on various parameters like the relationship between students' academic performance and the parents' interest. The influence of parents on students' attitude, results, self-image, enrollment and usefulness in the bigger picture have come under researchers' eyes.

Parental Involvement

The students' life is influenced by parents and teachers especially at early grade levels. The children's education is reflective of their families. The school teachers and parents are the two most important affecting bodies in the learning of the students in early years

of education. There is no agreed-upon definition of parental involvement. It could be on many levels like broadly speaking at school and outside of the school at home. Parents have a major role in shaping the cognitive and social developmental stages of the students especially at early years of education. The cognitive process starts at the early years in the life of a small kid due to their parental intervention. What the parents act are followed and reflected by the children. The kids are not concerned about the profession or status of their parents rather they observe what the parents do to them (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004).

According to Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), despite the social and family effects, the parents have a positive effect on the achievement of the children in academic sense. Similarly Duckworth (2008) found the attitude of the parents can define the quality of the school as they involve in the affairs of the school which will reflect back in the shape of students' performance. Avoiding the distractions at home, the parents can develop a tension free environment for their children which can enhance their speed of learning. This idea is supported in literature developed by Sharp, Keys and Benefield (2001) where they conclude students can react differently to various learning environments in varying degrees for different tasks.

Parental Involvement and Students' Achievement

According to McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004), parents' involvement has an empowering effect on the students. Those parents, who remain in contact with the educational institutions consistently keeping themselves aware of the children's academic performance, go through lesser hurdles than the parents who do not involve themselves in the affairs of the school. In return, the attention-receiving students at school also exhibit better relation with their peers, teachers and the learning environment they receive at

schools. The academic performance of the students in languages and mathematics have been observed better in the case of those parents who frequently involve in their children education as well as they poses positive attitude and beliefs about the teachers and the school. Thus, in this way they are subjected to lesser behavioral problems in the classroom activities (Rimm-Kauffman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003). There are many benefits in long term because of the relationship found between the school and the family. The grade promotion, for instance, is an example of parents' teacher association like volunteering and contacting teachers and asking them about the educational status of the students (Mantizicopoulos, 2003). The parents can know more about school, its activities, the teachers, the courses, books, and school programs and much more because they frequently engage with the schools. At the same time, it is motivating for the children when they see their parents sitting in the school, walking through classrooms, taking interest in the school functions etc., they realize the importance of the school and education. According to Davis (2000), the early childhood education can be made highly effective provided the parents are keenly interested in the education of their children. For instance, infants like to be talked to and played with, the toddlers like to listen to stories at their sleep time. The students at elementary school level should be helped out in their homework. Rules and regulation in moderation should be framed for teenagers. This will enhance them in terms of their performance at school.

Research Methodology

This study aimed to evaluate the teachers against their skills to create a better learning environment for students in the classrooms as well as their ability to collaborate with students' parents in order to improve students' learning. The researcher used mixed method. All

teachers, teaching at secondary school in public schools of district Haripur constituted the population of this research. The sample included 39 female and 51 male teachers (90 teachers) from 36 Secondary schools of Haripur which were conveniently accessible for researcher. To validate the teacher's response about their competencies, it was decided to ask their students to respond the same questionnaire about their teacher. For these purpose twenty students from different schools was requested to respond to the interview.

Rubric developed by Government of Pakistan for national standards was used for preparing questionnaire to evaluate teachers' capacity to create learning environment and to strengthen collaboration with parents. A questionnaire for teachers and an interview protocol for students were used as instruments of data collections. A questionnaire having nineteen statements was developed in the light of rubric used to evaluate teachers' competencies against professional standards in Pakistan. Eleven statements about learning environment included relationship and participation, classroom management, use of learning time etc., and eight statements reflecting collaboration and partnerships of parents and society in child learning were developed for questionnaire. An interview protocol for students was designed by the researcher with the purpose to validate the teacher's opinions against each statement of the questionnaire. It was piloted on 8 students. The result of pilot study revealed that three statements were vague and not successful in yielding meaningful data. The interview was then revised to eliminate those statements after the consent of experts and two statements were rephrased to make these clearer.

Researcher personally visited all the sample schools, Heads of institutions were requested to facilitate researcher for data collection process. Researcher with the permission of administration met teachers and briefed them about the objectives of the study. Teachers were then

requested to fill in the questionnaire as per their own convenience. Questionnaire was distributed among 45 female teachers from 15 schools and similarly 63 male teachers were also approached for the same purpose. Total 39 properly filled questionnaire from female teachers and 51 from male were recollected. School administrations, their teachers and concerned students thoroughly cooperated in the entire process of data collection, Researcher observed all the research ethics during and after data collection process. Total 20 students were interviewed and the process took more than 50 minutes for each interview. The responses were recorded with the permission of students. Analysis of data was done quantitatively with the help of statistical package for social sciences, chi square was applied, and data from interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

Results

Table 1 *Improving teaching keeping in view the individual needs*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	3 (7.7%)	19 (48.7%)	16 (41.0%)	0.989 p (0.804)
Male	2 (3.9%)	7 (13.7%)	23 (45.1%)	19 (37.3%)	
Significance Level: 0.05 df: 3					

Table showed that the female teachers (90%) and male teachers (82.4%) were agreed that they improve their teaching by addressing individual needs of each student in classroom. Calculated value of chi square was 0.989 for df (3) and p (0.804) showed that results were not statistically significant

Table 2 *Have professional relation with students*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	12 (30.8%)	17 (43.6%)	10 (25.6%)	11.672 p (0.009)
Male	1 (2.0%)	3 (5.9%)	23 (45.1%)	24 (47.1%)	
Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2					

Table above revealed that the female teachers (69.2%) and male teachers (92.2%) were agreed that they had developed professional relations with their students. Calculated value of chi square is 11.672 for df (3) and p (0.009) the results were statistically significant.

Table 3 *Encourage students' participation*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	18 (46.2%)	19 (48.7%)	1.872 p (0.599)
Male	0 (0%)	3 (5.9%)	24 (47.1%)	24 (47.1%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table depicted that the female teachers (94.9%) and male teachers (94.2%) were agreed that they used to encourage students for their healthy participation for better and pleasant learning environment of the classroom. Calculated value of chi square is 1.872 for df (3) and p (0.599) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 4 *Use different strategies for student's participation*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	1 (2.6%)	19 (48.7%)	19 (48.7%)	1.260 p (0.533)
Male	0 (0%)	4 (7.8%)	25 (49.0%)	22 (43.1%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Above table reflected that the female teachers (97.4%) and male teachers (92.1%) were agreed that they were using different strategies to ensure maximum students participation in learning process. Calculated value of chi square is 1.260 for df (2) and p (0.533) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 5 *Encourage peer learning*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	2 (5.1%)	22 (56.4%)	14 (35.9%)	2.318 p (0.095)
Male	0 (0%)	5 (9.8%)	25 (49.0%)	21 (41.2%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table above reflected that (92.3%) female teachers and (90.2%) male teachers were agreed that they used to apply and encourage peer learning in classroom teaching. Calculated value of chi square is 2.318 for df (3) and p (0.509) showed that the results were not statistically significant

Table 6 *Teacher knows the classroom strategies*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	20 (51.3%)	18 (46.2%)	2.717 p (0.437)
Male	0 (0%)	1 (2.0%)	22 (43.1%)	28 (54.9%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (97.5%) and male teachers (98%) were agreed they new many classroom strategies which helped us in making the classroom environment conducive. Calculated value of chi square is 2.717 for df-3 and p is (0.437) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 7 *Use positive methods to maintain standards of behavior*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	3 (7.7%)	16 (41.0%)	20 (51.3%)	2.398 p (0.301)
Male	0 (0%)	2 (3.9%)	29 (56.9%)	20 (39.2%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (92.3%) and male teachers (96.1%) were agreed that they used positive methods for maintaining students behavior of acceptable standard in the classroom teaching learning process. Calculated value of chi square is 2.398 for df (2) and p (0.301) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 8 *Use peer learning for better classroom management*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	3 (7.7%)	16 (41.0%)	19 (48.7%)	1.948 p (0.378)
Male	0 (0%)	2 (3.9%)	25 (49.0%)	24 (47.1%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 3

Table showed that female teachers (89.7%) and male teachers (96.1%) were agreed they used peer learning strategies for better classroom management. Calculated value of chi square is 2.196 for df (3) and p (0.533) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 9 *Engage students during learning*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	4 (10.3%)	8 (20.5%)	27 (69.2%)	9.168 p (0.010)
Male	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	22 (43.1%)	29 (56.9%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (89.7%) and male teachers (100%) were agreed that they engaged students in the teaching learning process. Calculated value of chi square is 9.168 for Df (2) and p (0.010) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 10 *Use classroom time in a useful way*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	2 (5.1%)	23 (59.0%)	14 (35.9%)	1.511 p (0.680)
Male	1 (2%)	1 (2.0%)	29 (56.9%)	20 (39.2%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 3

Table showed that female teachers (94.9%) and male teachers (96.1%) were agreed that they have been using classroom time effectively. Calculated value of chi square is 1.511 for df (3) and p (0.680) this showed that the results were not significant statistically.

Table 11 *Create positive learning environment*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	3 (7.7%)	20 (51.3%)	16 (41.0%)	2.172 p (0.338)
Male	0 (0%)	7 (13.7%)	30 (58.8%)	14 (27.5%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table depicted that female teachers (92.3%) and male teachers (86.3%) were agreed that they have created positive learning

environment in the class. Calculated value of chi square is 2.172 for df (2) and $p(0.338)$ showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 12 *Knows the importance of students' participation*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	10 (25.6%)	15 (38.5%)	14 (35.9%)	0.693 p (0.77)
Male	0 (0%)	11 (21.6%)	27 (52.7%)	13 (25.5%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table depicted that female teachers (97.4%) and male teachers (94.1%) were agreed they knew the importance of students' participation in teaching learning process. Calculated value of chi square is 0.693 for df (2) and $p(0.77)$ showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 13 *Organize small groups for collaborative learning*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	3 (7.7%)	19 (48.7%)	16 (41.0%)	2.528 p (0.470)
Male	0 (0%)	6 (11.8%)	29 (56.9%)	16 (31.4%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (89.7%) male teachers (88.3%) were agreed they have been using small group work within the classroom in order to promote collaborative learning. Calculated value of chi square is 2.528 for df (3) and $p(.470)$ showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 14 *Knows the role of parents in child education*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	3 (7.7%)	16 (41.0%)	20 (51.3%)	1.730 p (0.421)
Male	0 (0%)	1 (2.0%)	23 (45.1%)	27 (52.9%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table depicted that female teachers (92.3%) male teachers (98%) were agreed that they knew the role of parents in children

education. Calculated value of chi square is 1.730 for df (2) and p (0.421) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 15 *Create opportunities to meet with parents*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	4 (10.3%)	20 (51.3%)	15 (38.5%)	1.17 p (0.378)
Male	0 (0%)	6 (11.8%)	27 (52.9%)	18 (35.3%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table depicted that female teachers (89.8%) male teachers (88.2%) were agreed they have been trying to create opportunities for meeting with parents of the students. Calculated value of chi square is 1.17 for df (2) and p (0.943) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 16 *Engage parents through homework/ activities*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	4 (10.3%)	21 (53.8%)	13 (33.3%)	2.256 p (0.521)
Male	0 (0%)	9 (17.6%)	27 (52.9%)	15 (29.4%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (87,1%) male teachers (82.3%) were agreed that they tried to engage parents of the students in their children education through homework activities and through written correspondence as well. Calculated value of chi square is 2.256 for df (3) and p (0.521) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 17 *Awareness of using resources within the school*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	2 (5.1%)	16 (41.0%)	21 (53,8%)	1.821 p (0.402)
Male	0 (0%)	2 (3.9%)	22 (43.1%)	27 (52.9%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (94.8%) and male teachers (96%) were agreed they were aware about the use of community

resources for learning of students in classrooms. Calculated depicts that the calculated value of chi square is 1.821 for df (2) and p (0.402) showed that the results were not significant statistically.

Table 18 *Use resources to improve children's learning*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	0 (0%)	3 (7.7%)	20 (51.3%)	16 (41.0%)	0.319 p (0.852)
Male	0 (0%)	4 (7.8%)	29 (56.9%)	18 (35.3%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 2

Table showed that female teachers (92.3%) and male teachers (92.2%) were agreed that they were using different resources to improve and enrich the students learning in classroom. Calculated value of chi square is 0.319 for df (2) and p (0.852) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Table 19 *Knows how to utilize partnership*

Teachers	SDA	DA	A	SA	Chi square
Female	1 (2.6%)	6 (15.4%)	25 (64.1%)	7 (17.9%)	2.732 p (0.435)
Male	0 (0%)	5 (9.8%)	32 (62.7%)	14 (27.5%)	

Significance Level: 0.05 df: 3

Table depicted that female teachers (82%) and male teachers (90.2%) were agreed that they knew how to utilize partnership in the community to contribute to students learning in the schools. The calculated value of chi square is 2.732 for df (3) and p(0.435) showed that the results were not statistically significant.

Qualitative Aspect of Study

1. Do teachers have professional relation with students?

Some of the student agreed that teacher has professional attitude with student while most of them responded in disagreement.

2. Do teachers encourage student's participation for pleasant learning environment?

Student disagree that teacher enhance pleasant learning environment by involving student.

3. Do teachers use different strategies for student's participation?

Students were not agreed that teacher used different strategies for supporting children's involvement.

4. Do teachers use strategies of peer learning for better classroom management?

Student strongly disagreed that teacher create effective positive management of the learning space through collaborative efforts between the children and the teacher.

5. Do teachers use classroom time in a useful way?

Student agreed that teachers used well developed routines leading to efficient use of classroom hours most of the time.

6. Do teachers create positive learning environment?

Student strongly disagreed that teachers created positive learning environment through encouragement and involvement in choices about the approach, content, pace and goals of learning.

7. Do teachers organize small groups to reflect the collaborative learning?

Student strongly disagreed that teacher organized small groups and they also pointed out that activities which promote collaborative learning were never planned or executed.

8. Do teacher create opportunities to meet with parents?

Student agreed that teacher attempted to create opportunities to meet with parents to discuss children's learning but in most of the cases parents did not bother to see teachers.

Discussion

By conducting the study it was concluded that most of the teachers totally ignored this very important element that pleasant and better learning environment plays a pivotal role in effective and

conducive learning, while Savage (1999), and MacAulay (1990) gave most importance towards this aspect. According to MacAulay (1990) peer or group learning is very important for effective learning, and also use full for student's social behavior, similarly Walker and Walker (1991) found in their studies students may be arranged in cluster or in adequately spaced rows that will enhance the learning process with better socialization among the learners. But study revealed that most of the teachers did not plan any strategies for this important issue. It was concluded that most of the teachers adopted teacher centered method of teaching which may lack student's self-confidence and self-correction which is very necessary for students learning development, because Bettenhausen (1998), Nusche, Earl, Maxwell, and Shewbridge (2011) were also strong supporters of this aspect that learning should be student centered and teachers should involve students in their learning process. The studies by Cotton and Wikelund (1989) found parents 'interest and involvement can enhance the performance of the students and help on all grounds for the students. These studies were also supported by Mcwayne, et al., (2004). The study revealed that although most of the teachers know the role of parents in students learning but they did not plan to involve parents in learning process of the children. The role of the parents and society in children's learning is very important. According to Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), despite the social and family effects, the parents have a positive effect on the achievement of the children in academic sense. Similarly, Duckworth (2008) Sharp, Keys and Benefield (2001) and Geiser (1999) also supported these studies. The present study revealed that mostly teachers ignored this very important aspect.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Following conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made on the basis of results. It was concluded that teachers were not

taking care in creating conducive learning environment of the class. It was recommended that teachers may be trained to involve all of the learners in learning process so that they know how learners are progressing and hence learners will receive individual attention. Teachers adopted teachers centered teaching learning approach in classroom. Teachers may be oriented through training that students are rich sources of learning and in the context of 21st century students know a lot and they need to be involved in teaching learning process. Teachers didn't keep in mind the individual needs of the students for making learning more effective. Teachers did not involve and collaborate with students and parents for developing and enhancing the pleasant learning environment. It is also recommended that teachers may be encouraged to identify strengths and weaknesses of learners and plan their instruction accordingly. Teachers need to be motivated to develop strong link with parents and communities for better collaboration and students support. Teachers did not appreciate and support peer learning for better learning environment. Teachers did not use or they were not well aware of strategies for classroom management. Teachers did not use positive method to maintain appropriate standards of behaviors. Teachers did not use well developed routines lead to efficient use of classroom hours most of the time. It is recommended that teachers need to know the importance of different teaching activities and strategies of students learning. Teachers may be trained and develop their capacity to apply different learning strategies, apply appropriate management skills, and raise the moral standard of students by displaying a role model. Teachers did not create positive learning environment through encouragement and involvement in choices about the approach, content, pace and goals of learning. Teachers did not aware of the importance of student's involvement in making decision about learning. Teachers need to know

how students can be used as learning source, how their views can be valued, how they may be involved in teaching learning process, how students in general motivated to participate actively in the teaching learning process. Teachers organized small groups but they did not plan any activities to promote collaborative learning. Teachers were well aware the role of parents in their children's education and also understand the importance of communication between school and home. Teachers tried to create opportunities to meet with parents to discuss children's learning. Mostly teachers did not identify and use variety of resources to improve and enrich children's learning. Teachers may be motivated, encouraged and appreciated if they involve any expert of any field from the community for students learning in schools (e.g., Imams, any educationist, any other remarkable personality of the community). Most of the teachers did not establish respectful and productive partnership with diverse families, educators and other in a community to support children's wellbeing. It is also recommended that teachers may be encouraged to establish Alumni and try to invite them at different important occasions like result day, sports days, national days etc., Alumni can be properly used in fund raising activities for schools and students.

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