

Conducive Classroom Environment in Schools

Anjali Singh

Assistant Professor, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract: *Learning takes place within a web of social relationships as teachers and pupils interact both formally and informally. Schools are institutional spaces for communities of learners, including both students and teachers. Education to be effective in schools, the environment needs to be conducive to learning, allowing the pupils space and time to interact within the learning and teaching process. Creating and maintaining stimulating learning environments can be achieved through effective classroom organization, interactive and whole school displays and a climate of innovation. Learning is directly linked to stimulants available in schools. Two schools were selected to find out the stimulants available that affects the learning of the students in schools. Teacher's behavior, good infrastructural, excursions were found out to be major stimulants in the schools for students whereas the methods of teaching like conducting activities, discussions, demonstrations were also considered as an important factors bring students to the classrooms. Hence, stimulating environment is a pre-requisite for better learning and understanding.*

Keywords: Environment, Learning, Perception, Stimulants

1. Introduction

In all aspects of the school and its surrounding education community, the rights of the whole child, and all children, to survival, protection, development and participation are at the centre. This means that the focus is on learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes; and which creates for children, and helps them create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction.

Rabindranath Tagore says, "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information, but makes our life in harmony with all existence". "The mind of the child is always on the alert, restless and eager to receive firsthand knowledge from Mother Nature. Children should be surrounded with the things of nature which have their own educational value. Their minds should be allowed to stumble upon and surprised at everything that happens in today's life" Rabindranath Tagore's ShantiNiketan is a renowned educational institution across the world. Santiniketan is a small town near Bolpur in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, India, and approximately 180 kilometres north of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). It was made famous by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, whose vision became what is now a university town (Visva-Bharati University) that attracts thousands of visitors each year. Shantiniketan is a tourist attraction also because Rabindranath lived here and penned many of his literary classics (namely Tagore songs, poems, novels etc.) and his home is a place of historical importance.

Attractions-A China Bhavana: A centre for Chinese studies. Natir Puja, a dance drama of Tagore is painted on its wall under the guidance of Nandalal Bose, pioneering Indian artist. Kala Bhavan: The College of Fine Arts & Crafts has a museum exhibiting sculptures, frescoes & murals and a library of art books and many others. Rabindranath Tagore created a natural environment for their students to learn things better which they can retain for their lifetime. Now a day's schools providing so many stimulating environments to make their students to lead to better learning

"Children's minds are sensitive to the influences of the world. Their sub-conscious minds are active, always imbibing some lesson, and realizing the joy of knowing. This sensitive receptivity allows them, without any strain, to master language, which is the most complex and difficult instrument of expression, full of indefinite ideas and abstract thinking.

According to educational philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore a young boy was interested to a great scientist for instruction and training. The scientist left the boy in the vast laboratory and taught him nothing. When asked why he had taught him nothing he replied, "if the boy had not caught anything from the environs of such a laboratory, it would be no good teaching him either. Real education is got from stimulating atmosphere. Education in ancient India was based upon this theory. The child was handed over to the Guru (Preceptor) with whom he lived, talked, worked, walked, studied, rendered him service, paid him homage in love and labor and values of the Preceptor. Tagore exactly believed in such a theory of education through stimulating atmosphere. He did not wish the ideas to be stuffed in the minds of children, but caught through invisible contagion. To him education was not "the conscious process of filling but the sub-conscious process of absorption" (Taneja, 1980).

1.1 Stimulants

According to oxford dictionary the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates. 'A multi-sensory environment is a dedicated space or room where stimulation can be controlled, manipulated, intensified, reduced, presented in isolation or combination, packaged for active or passive interaction and temporally matched to fit the perceived motivation, interests, leisure, relaxation, therapeutic and/or educational needs of the user. It can take a variety of physical, psychological and sociological forms'.

Stimulating environment provides an area for users to control, manipulate, intensify or reduce stimulation within a safe environment (Best, 1992) while relaxing, interacting and learning from one another (Glenn *et al.*, 1996). The

chief stimulants were the computer's increased capacity to stimulate complex thought process a reawakened interest in the strategies people use to solve difficult problems, a demonstration of certain reasoning and communicative. By stimulating the senses, the individual learning can be enhanced, for example- if a person prefers to learn through visual aids, "seeing" material should be used. Another person may prefer listening and thus, audio related education materials should be used. The sense of touch, taste and smell should also be included in the learning process. However, it has been noted that the seeing and the hearing senses are mostly used in ones learning. In many schools, this is put into practice with a variety of classes that are given, from the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic to the special or electives of music, drama and athletics.

1.2 Stimulating environment in classroom

A child's development is directly linked to its ability to interact with its environment. Children develop an understanding of themselves through their interactions with events and materials outside themselves (Piaget, 1951). All environments have the ability to contribute or retard this process. Anita Old states that "the motivation to interact with the environment exists in all children as an intrinsic property of life, but the quality of the interactions is dependent upon the possibilities for engagement that the environment provides".

The finding of the Milwaukee and the British studies are consistent with those of earlier investigation. The cognitive development of the children is likely to be facilitated if they are exposed to the environments that are stimulating in which they get considerable attention and that provide them with the enriched cognitive experiences.

The term environment is broad. It covers layout, furniture and decoration but also the emotional climate that is created. Getting the environment right for the children makes a considerable difference. Children who feel comfortable, yet stimulated in the environment are able to settle in and enjoy learning. It also has an impact on parents as they can see that the environment will be a safe and secure one for their children. Interestingly, children also respond to the environment that they are in. behavior can be improved in responsive, stimulating environments that have been carefully planned.

A first step in making changes is to acknowledge the role of the environment in children's lives. The environments that children experience in their early years of life are responsible for creating their understanding of many concepts, giving them spatial awareness, educating their senses, nourishing their curiosity, and encouraging their interaction. For some children with special needs this process does not happen so spontaneously. For these children you need to be aware of their skill level and preferences in order to piece together activities and sensory information in a way that will entice them to interact with their surroundings.

1.3 Perception of teachers

Teachers are important and make a difference. The quality of teaching is a crucial factor promoting effective learning in schools. Effective teaching requires individual who are academically able and who care about the well-being of children and youth.

A good teacher can play important role in the learning of an individual. He can (1) Observe the individual and try to understand his present abilities, interests, and needs, (2) Stimulate and encourage him to explore them further, and (3) help to provide further experiences of a nature as he can probably use in satisfying the needs and curiosities he feels at the moment. The effective teacher is an artist at guiding a student experiences in ways that will satisfy, at least in parts, some of the need she feels at that time.

Teachers can extend invitations for expressions to children and provide a containing feeling to hold those expressions in part through their design of the environment. A classroom that consists of rows of desks, a globe, a flag and some bookshelves communicates that the priority is order and teacher-directed learning. A classroom that has a variety of materials, such as crayons and paper, a block corner and wood-working and dramatic-play areas, communicates that symbolic activity, self-expression and social endeavors are valued. A classroom that is loaded with materials that flow from one space to another and in which every inch of wall space is covered with posters or children's work is likely to be an over-stimulating environment. A classroom with clearly defined centers while children can explore various kinds of learning and move between personal and social endeavors may be the most conducive to emotionally responsive practice when it coexists with a well-thought-out routine, an attached teacher, and an emphasis on the use of symbol and metaphor (Skinner, 2006).

1.4 Perception of students

Students' perception friendliness of the environment may or may not be accurate. But, if they are then changes need to be made. Research on change has indicated that the person be asked to change must be involved in the process. Therefore, the student to be consulted about how to rectify the environment. For example if a child fails it is too noisy to study at home, adults can ask what needs to be done to make it quite. It may be as simple as asking, "what would be take for you to do well?" it is important that students be involved in helping find solutions to the environmental road blocks. When consulting students about how their environment might be modified, active and empathetic listening on the part of the parent or teacher is crucial. Active listening is powerful tool; chances are that those who influence us most are power endless practice worksheets of multiplication facts are senseless. An environmental change is required in this situation (Francis, 2005).

1.5 Perception of school administrators

Teachers can do a lot to encourage creativity in their classes but it's a job only half done without the support of the school leadership. School leaders have the ability to build an

expectation of creativity into a school's learning and teaching strategies. They can encourage, recognize and reward creativity in both pupils and teachers. School leaders have the ability to provide resources for creative endeavors; to involve teachers and pupils in creating stimulating environments; to tap the creativity of staff, parents and the local community and much more. They have the ability to make creativity art of the staff development programme to include creativity in everyone's performance reviews; to invite creative people into the school and most important of all, to lead by example!! (Morris, 2006).

2. Significance of the Study

Providing a stimulating environment is a pre-requisite for better learning and understanding. We want to conduct this study to find out the perceptions of learners, teachers and principal about the stimulants which help in enhancing the learning among students. This will help us in identifying the various stimulants which act like a driving force for the better learning and understanding.

General Objectives: To study the role of stimulating environment in facilitating learning of the students.

Specific Objectives

- To study the perception of teachers regarding what acts as stimulant for students to learn.
- To study the perception of administrators on how can the school as a whole act as a stimulant to facilitate learning?
- To find out children's ideas on what motivates them to learn better and what changes can be introduced within the school to make it a fun learning place.
- To identify the various stimulants which act like a driving force for the better learning and understanding.

3. Methodology

Locale: The study was conducted in 2 different private schools of Delhi to determine the various stimulants that facilitate learning in students. All the data were collected from Presidum School and G. D. Goneka School situated in Indirapuram and Karkardooma.

Sample: Students, teachers and principals were interviewed to gather the information regarding various stimulants. A total of 300 students would be randomly selected from all the sections of VII Standard from both the schools (Presidum School and G. D. Goneka School) All the major subject teachers (n=15) i.e. Mathematics, Science, English, Hindi, Social Science, Art/Music, Sports of VII Standard were interviewed. Principal of both the schools will also be interviewed for the same.

Tools: Semi Structured Interview Schedule was used to elicit the perceptions of students as to what acts as a stimulant for them, what is an ideal school and their suggestions on how to make school a fun learning place. Two interview schedules were prepared and pretested to gather information regarding stimulants from Teachers and Principals.

Data Analysis

Feedback from the respondents were taken, coded and tabulated as per the objectives of the study. The data was analyzed for both quantitative and qualitative indicators.

4. Major Findings

Happy in School: It is very important for the students to feel happy and content with their school. If a student is happy to go to school then it might be possible that school provides a stimulating environment to him/her. Therefore, students going to schools (Presidum School and G. D. Goneka School) were asked whether they were happy in school or not. About 85% of the students were happy in their school and remaining 15% were unhappy.

Almost 70% said that they liked their school because the teachers. This shows that role of a good teacher plays an important part in their lives. About 25% said good facilities such as medical facilities, security facilities, water coolers, various rooms for different activities, availability of E rooms etc. Other 5% reasons given for liking the school were good friends, organization of various activities, good studies and adoption of good teaching methods such as demonstrations, activities and discussions.

Going to school vs Taking off from school: A very interesting fact that emerged out was, the students despite of having option of not going (bunking) to the school, yet is willing to attend it. Though the student's stimulating factor are many as well as various negative aspects got reflected but even when they are given option to stay at home or go with their parents out, they prefer not to miss the studies. This in some way reflects the sort of unconscious bonding which the school has maintained with the students that stops them to get away.

Good things about their school: Students were also enquired about the 4 good things that they liked the most about their school. Sports activities and good teachers topped the list with 30% each. Students perceived that good teachers are an important part of their school. Also children of 7th standard were fascinated with the sports activities held in their school. Play is an important part of their lives. As a result nearly 15% considered a big playground to be one of the good things about their school. A good playground is very important for recreational activities. Rest said that their school had good technology (15%). Rest of them gave responses such as good laboratories, art and work experience classes, school canteen, dance and music activities and good discipline to be some of the positive or good things about their school which stood them apart from others.

Difference between your school and others: Almost 50% students responded said that their schools facilities are good and 38% students appreciated teachers, and rest 12% students preferred infrastructure provided in the school to be different.

Role of good infrastructure: On being asked "is your school different from other schools in terms of infrastructure", more than half of them did not believe that their school had

different infrastructure from other schools. This constituted almost 54% of students. The rest 46% thought that their school infrastructure was definitely different from other schools whether good or bad. Some of them were not satisfied with their infrastructure. They thought that their school building is very old and needs renovation. It had poor construction, needed better painted walls. They also felt an increased need of E-rooms and smart classes. They wanted better hygiene conditions in their classrooms, toilets and canteen.

Need for separate rooms for different activities: Almost 90% of the students agreed to the fact that they needed separate rooms for separate activities. Other (10%) did not feel the need for separate rooms for separate activities. Students require separate rooms for separate activities because they feel that it facilitates better learning (31%), it also helps in better maintenance and organization of rooms and activities (24%) and helps in better space management (21%). They also require separate rooms because they believe that with the availability of more rooms, many more activities can be organized in their school (4%), it makes the learning environment interesting and there is also freedom of expression (2%).

Role of teacher: When students were asked if they felt their teachers were different, only 58% agreed to it. Rest 42% thought that their teachers were not different from other school's teachers. When we compared both the schools, almost same number of children agreed that they had different teachers. Nearly 70% liked their teachers because they had a good nature. According to them they were very polite, friendly, caring, kind, patient, frank, cooperative and sensitive to their needs and problems. Some of them (20%) were even satisfied with the teaching methods they adopted for teaching. Also teachers clarified the doubts of children not just once but again and again as and when required. They also considered their teachers to be different because of their content knowledge and qualification. Nearly 10% children agreed to this.

Quality of Teachers: When asked about "what qualities of the teachers students like the most", the diverse responses were given by the respondents. The personal attitude of the teachers towards the students affect the student's likes and dislikes the most. According to the data about 48% liked the teacher's polite, helping, understanding etc natures. 17% of the respondents said that they liked the teachers who clarify their doubts. Knowledge about the content and method of teaching got 13 % each. Rest Approachability of the teachers was only 9% and most of the time was out of reach.

Behavior of Teachers: Out of the total sample under study, half of them reported that their teachers were very friendly and 35% students considered their teacher's behavior towards them to be polite. Rest 15% said that their teacher's behavior was rude.

Approachability of Teacher: Students were more comfortable in approaching their teachers as compared to their peers. More than half of the students (55%) preferred approaching teachers because they thought teachers knew much more than their peers and hence they are in a better

position to help them out. 44% students were comfortable in approaching their peers in case of any doubt because some of them were afraid to go and ask teachers. Rest, 1% had no particular preference for teachers or peers.

Best Teaching Method: Conducting activities was considered to be the best teaching method by students. 40% percent children agreed with the same. The next best teaching method was discussion (22%), followed by teaching in E rooms (20%). More than half of the children believed that they could learn better in an E Room. Excursion method was also very popular among students. Almost 10% students reported that they liked the excursion method of teaching. Demonstration and lecture method was least liked by students which constituted 4% each. So therefore, it can be concluded that activity method of teaching was most popular among students and they found it more useful than other methods of teaching.

Working in a Group: Almost 60% students reflected that working in a group help in some or the other way like better understanding, whereas in contrast 40 % stated that it does not help in any way.

Favorite Subject: Science was the favorite subject of students. It was liked by 30% students. It was closely followed by social studies and mathematics 27% each. Language was also liked by 11% students which included Hindi and English. Art and music and sports were liked by less number of students only. Students liked a particular subject majorly because of teacher's nature and the methodology adopted in teaching.

Favorite Teacher: Student's favorite subject teacher was Science teacher which was liked by 33% children, followed by Social science teacher with 30%. Mathematics and English teachers were also liked by 15% students each. Rest preferred Art and music and games teachers. As mentioned earlier also, the reasons for liking for a particular teacher could be due to their nature and/or the methods adopted for teaching.

Educational Trips: Out of the total study sample, almost half of them (97%) agreed that they were taken out for educational trips and it helped them in better retention of concepts also it improved their knowledge and understanding of the subject. For others (3%) educational trips gave them opportunity to enjoy with their friends. Some of them do not find educational trips very useful because they feel that they are not in accordance with the syllabus and also they do not take them so seriously.

5. Perception of Teachers

Stimulants to make good classroom: Out of 12 teachers 3 felt that students learn things by doing themselves. School as an institution provides new opportunities for all the students to learn things on their own and knowledge is the outcome of child's own activity. Whereas 2 teachers felt students are stimulated by things from their natural environment such as adequate light, fresh air and green plants.

Types of Stimulants used by the teachers: About 8 teachers felt that performing any kind of activity in the classroom is the best stimulant that they provide to students. As per NCF 2005 Activities enable teachers to give individualised attention to children, and to make alterations in a task depending on their requirements and variations in the level of interest. Also providing e-rooms for the students makes the learning effective.

Approaches used by teachers to stimulate learning: Most of the teachers felt that use of different kinds of teaching aids in the classrooms stimulate learning process. The practices of teachers in classrooms, the materials they use should be consistent and planned before (NCF 2005). Half of the teachers were of the view that interactive sessions help the students to ask questions. Also, children must be encouraged to answer in their own words.

Classroom Management: About 5 teachers adopted the technique of dividing the students in the groups to maintain the discipline in the class where others used discussions and relating content with daily life experiences and teaching aids to manage the class. A lesson that is planned well can challenge students to think about the content that is being taught in the class, so were the views of some of the teachers.

Effects of techniques and technologies: Providing children more direct access to multimedia equipment and Information Communication Technology (ICT), and allowing them to mix and make their own productions and to present their own experiences, could provide them with new opportunities to explore their own creative imagination (NCF 2005). Almost all the teachers (10) felt that there was a positive impact of technologies on learning.

Knowledge about Constructivism: Almost all the teachers (11) were using constructivist approach in their classroom like conducting activities, demonstrations, taking out students for excursions etc. but they were not familiar with the term constructivism. Learning is a process of construction of knowledge.

6. Perception of Principal

Factors influencing learning in schools: "A friendly atmosphere, conducive to learning has to be created in the classroom and freedom to acquire knowledge at one's own pace could be the factors that enhance learning in schools"-Principal of G.D.Goneka school. Children will learn only in an atmosphere where they feel they are valued. Our children need to feel that each one of them, their homes, communities, languages and cultures, are valuable as resources for experience to be analyzed and enquired into at school" (NCF, 2005).

Strategies should be adopted to stimulate learning:

Principal of G.D.Goneka School believed that each and every child should feel wanted, loved and cared, Comfort level in the classrooms should be taken care of, Self Discipline and desire for knowledge should be included.

Principal of Presidium School stated that teachers must also keep themselves in tune with the changing times. The role of parents in the progress of the child should not be underestimated.

Infrastructure in schools that enhance learning: Principals of both the schools stated there should be adequate space, Well-lighted classrooms, and well furnished Library and Equipped labs in order to enhance learning.

Qualities in a teacher: As per NCFTE 2009 Teachers should take care for children and love to be with them, love knowledge and be constantly learning, they should change their perception of child as a receiver of knowledge and encourage its capacity to construct knowledge. Teachers should to be trained in organizing learner centered, activity based, participatory learning experiences -play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits, integrating academic.

7. Conclusion

- Students found to be attending school rather than going for an outing, reflects the stimulating environment provided in the school.
- Along with the teacher equal importance was given to the playground as a stimulating factor.
- Teacher's behavior came out to be the most effective stimulant as students believed that rudeness restricts them.
- Liking for the subject and the teacher were interrelated as students liked the subject because the teacher's behavior.
- Good infrastructural facilities act as stimulants as it was given utmost importance.
- Students were more comfortable in approaching their teachers as compared to their peers.
- Conducting activities was considered to be the best teaching method by students followed by discussion method even teachers also liked to conduct activities in the classroom to make the class more participatory.
- Majority believed that working in groups helps in the coordination and understanding of the concept.
- There should be separate rooms for different activities so that simultaneously many activities can take place.
- Educational trips were preferred by the students because of retention and understanding of the subject.
- Teachers gave full freedom of expression to the students as they come up with their own ideas in the classroom.
- Teachers used discussion method to maintain the discipline in the classroom rest related the content to daily lives.
- All the teachers were aware of the constructivism approach as they stated learning is a process of construction of knowledge.
- Whereas Principals said that friendly environment and good infrastructural facilities are important stimulants in the school.

8. Suggestions

- Classroom environment plays a very important role in learning.
- Other aspects can also be added to the study.

- Study can be conducted on a larger scale.

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Author Profile



Anjali Singh received the Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Education, Master of Science degree in Development Communication and Extension, NET/JRF, Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi in 2011. She is presently working as Assistant Professor at Lady Irwin College, University of Delhi.