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Classroom Environment at Secondary Level: Is it learning friendly?

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Abstract

This study aims to explore whether the secondary classroom environment is learning friendly or not. Mixed method approach is employed for collecting and analyzing data from respective sources. Teachers, students and classroom sessions have been selected randomly from 24 schools. Interview schedule, questionnaire and observation checklist are used as data collection tools. Findings reveal that majority teachers share experiences, discuss familiar issues, and tell stories in relation with class lessons. A good number of teachers use the most traditional aids like chalkboard along with few emphasize on charts, posters and real objects. The student friendly aids are to some extent ignored in secondary classrooms. Surprisingly, students are still physically harassed or verbally abused by their friend and teachers. Teachers assess students' learning during class and feedback to students is provided but not extensively. However, majority teachers disallow students to asked questions and not answer properly. Therefore, this study suggests that learning friendly environment should be ensured that can invite students to achieve expected outcomes.

1. Introduction

Classroom environment is one of the major aspects for ensuring quality teaching-learning. If you want to ensure the quality education and positive learning for students, you might be ensured the student friendly classroom environment (UNESCO, 2001). This aims to develop a learning environment in which students are motivated and able to learn, staff members are friendly and welcoming to students and attend to... (Young, 2002). In addition, classroom environment covers a range of educational concepts including physical setting, psychological environment created through social contexts, and numerous instructional components related to teacher characteristics and behaviors. Particularly, the physical arrangement in classroom can affect the behaviour of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999; Stewart & Evans, 1997) and well-structured classroom can improve students' academic and behavioural outcomes (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

The classroom is not simply a place in which students learn academic lessons (Lee, 2006). It is a social context in which students learn social lessons such as friendship, cooperation and appropriate behaviour. All this takes place provided a teacher has the capacity to attract the students by demonstrating care and making the classroom fun for young children. In addition, classroom should be set up to set the stage for teacher to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of students (MacAulay, 1990). Moreover, classroom is a critical focus for pupils' inter-personal and educational development (Pierce, 1994). Classroom environment such as the physical, emotional and aesthetic characteristics of classroom are also tend to enhance student attitude towards learning (Goodlard, 1984). However, this study have confined only on the pedagogical aspects relating to classroom environment: teaching-learning strategies, teacher-student relationships and classroom assessment.

2. Rationale of study

The education system are facing various intensify challenges (OECD, 2009); classroom environment is one of them which is an important determinant of student learning in educational system (Fraser, 1994). Classroom environment depends on some key elements like teaching learning process,

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motivation, teaching aid, teacher student relationship, peer relationship and classroom assessment. Wei & Elias (2011) stated that classroom environment plays important role in motivating students to learn while poor classroom environment accelerates students' dropout at secondary level. Not only in Bangladesh, but also in other countries like Malaysia and Nigeria are also facing lack of classroom environment problem (Oluremi, 2012). Therefore, to develop our secondary education and reduce dropout rate, the classroom environment might be measured on whether it is learning friendly or not.

This study will inform the policy makers about the present environment of secondary classrooms. It will further inform the classroom teachers and create an opportunity to think about their classrooms for ensuring quality teaching-learning. Eventually, it will facilitate for achieving the learning outcomes through establishment of learning friendly environment in classrooms.

3. Statement of problem
The study focuses on existing secondary classroom environment focusing on whether it is learning friendly or not. However, classroom environment in this study basically based on pedagogical aspects of classroom.

4. Review of literature
Classroom environment is the combination of variables within a classroom that work together to promote students learning. There are several variables that influence a classroom's environment, that's why every classroom is unique. Some essential elements are incorporate with classroom environment like teaching learning process, motivation, relationship between teachers-students and among students, behaviour of students and teachers, well-structured classroom and assessment process (Stewart & Evans, 1997; Walker & Walker, 1991). Classroom environment plays essential role that promotes motivation among students in classroom (Wei & Elias, 2011). A good relationship between teachers-students and among students is the part of classroom environment (Goh & Khine, 2002). Therefore, classrooms should be organized to accommodate a variety of activities throughout the day and to meet the teacher's instructional goals (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992).

Several researches for example, in Nigeria, 25% schools are not learning friendly due to the poor classroom environment (Oluremi, 2012). Moreover, in Malaysia, the dropout rate for secondary school students is 9.3% in urban areas and 16.7% in rural areas a result of motivation particularly in classroom environment (Koh, 2007). From another research, 14,600 students in year 2006 and more than 15,400 students in year 2004 had been caught playing truant. These kinds of school failure and dropout may represent the low student academic motivation in classroom (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meege, 2008).

5. Objective of this study
This study aims to explore the classroom environment at secondary level is inclusive and learning friendly. The specific objectives are:

" to explore the nature of teaching-learning strategies in secondary classrooms;

" to identify the teacher-students relationship in secondary classrooms; and

" to examine the nature of classroom assessment in secondary schools.

6. Methodology
Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed in this study. The mainstream secondary schools located in six districts are brought under the purview of research. The students of grade VI-IX, teachers and classrooms are considered as primary data sources. A total of 24 schools are selected randomly from 6 districts. A total of 96 teachers, 384 students and 48 classes have been selected randomly. Interview schedule, questionnaire and observation checklist have been used for teachers, students and classroom teaching-learning activities respectively. Finally, collected data are analysed through mixing of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

7. Data analysis

The data analysis is presented based on the identified issues under the study objectives. The analyzed data are presented accordingly.

A. Teaching Learning Strategy

Teaching-learning process

Mixing several techniques dominate the secondary classroom teaching-learning. However, classroom observations indicate the dominance of lecture method in secondary classrooms. Teachers also share their experiences, discuss familiar issues, and tell stories during class and use few aids like pictures. Although teachers use different types of methods individually and together while taking classes, majority students don't know which method is easy to understand. However, 48% students identified that reading with interesting story is the most ease method to understand while others mentioned easy explanation (12%), and discussion (13).

Figure 1: Major teaching methods in secondary classes
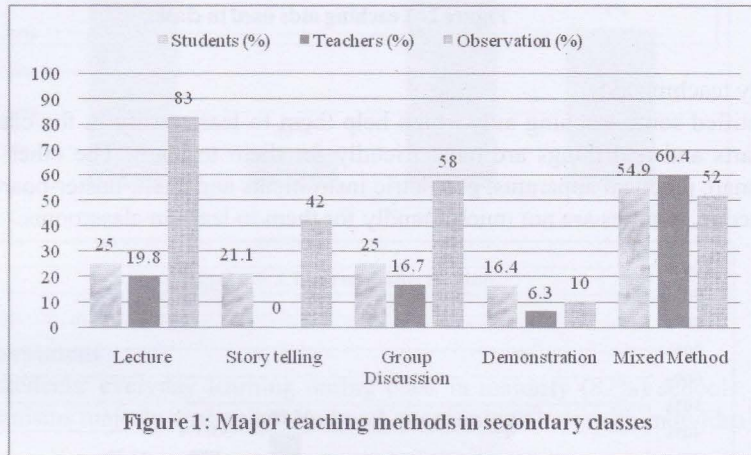
Majority teachers give group works forming groups with different types of students but separating boys and girls. Only a few (14%) groups are formed with a combination of boys and girls and on students' choice. The group works are effective for majority students.

Teachers' initiatives for slow learners

Teachers usually provide different types of support for slow learners or for them who take time to achieve learning objectives. Forming proper group maintaining heterogeneous learners and discussing with parents are major initiatives. Other initiatives are reorganizing seating arrangement and providing addition supports to students outside of class period. However, few teachers concentrate on individual needs and help them in classroom learning. Therefore, some students are found inactive and/or inattentive in classes.

Teaching aids

Majority teachers use the most common aids like chalkboard. The other teaching aids are the posters, real objects, charts, models, geometric instruments map, globe, scale, microscope, practical apparatus, pictures etc. in some classes. Students enjoyed the charts and real objects in learning.

They also like teaching aids relevant to subject matters, attractive, and colourful. The common aids are not interesting to students in teaching-learning. Teachers also supported that real objects are most effective aids to teach in class.

Figure 2: Teaching aids used in class
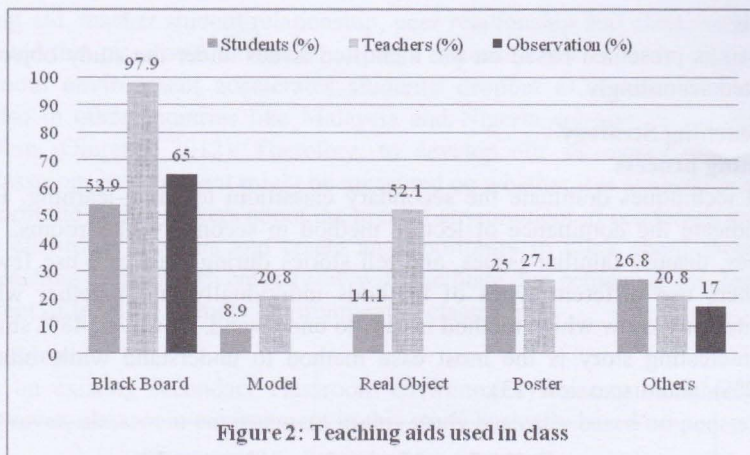
" Learning friendly teaching aids

The students identified some teaching aids which help them to learn easily in the classroom. Majority students think charts and real things are most friendly for them to learn. The other learning friendly teaching aids are map, practical apparatus, geometric instruments and chalk-duster-board. They informed that globe, microscope, pictures are not much friendly for them to learn in classrooms.

Figure 3: Learning friendly teaching aids
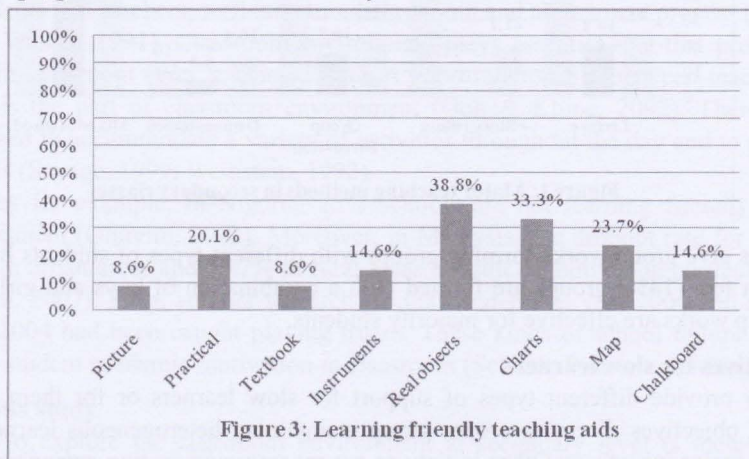
B. Teacher Student Relationship

Student-Teacher-Student relationship

Teachers are not friendly to all students in the secondary classrooms. Teachers' liking and disliking have an adverse effect on students' learning in classrooms. A vast majority (70%) of students don't know, why teachers like them or why not. Some students identified regularity in learning and well behaviour in class as reasons.

Teachers influence students to help their friends for academic purposes. As a result most (96%) students help each other in academic activities and seek assistance from classmates. They help classmates to understand subject matters and solve problems individually and in group.

Teachers' initiative in developing peer relationship

Secondary students are not much adult to understand the basis of low achievers, even the children came from poor economic background. That's why sometimes they harassed those children physically or verbally. In that situation majority students generally don't come to their teachers, however, teachers took

some measures when someone accused. In majority cases teachers yelled verbally and punished in many ways like keep standing, sent outside etc. It is noticeable that some teachers don't take any measures in this situation.

Classroom interaction

A good number of teachers addressed students mentioning name. Teachers (69%) give opportunity to students to participate in discussion and few allow asking questions on lessons. However, majority teachers didn't answers properly against the asked questions. Students seem nervous and worry while asking questions. Teachers are not much attentive while listening to students' questions.

Figure 5: Classroom interaction
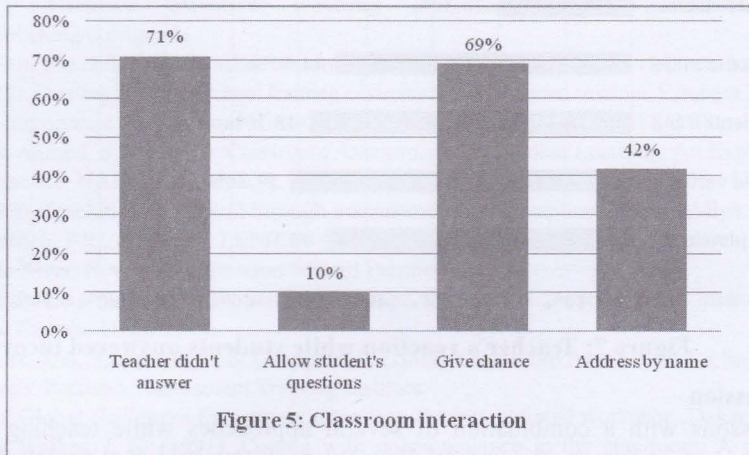
C. Classroom assessment

Teachers assess students' everyday learning during class in majority (82%) schools. They use several assessment mechanisms majorly written test and oral questioning along with individual and group works and quizzes.

The assessment episodes are employed uniformly to all students and assessment tasks are mainly on discussed lessons and taken from textbooks. Some questions are taken from outside text book but related to the discussed topics.

Feedback to students

Teachers provide general feedback to students where individual student's needs are ignored. Majority teachers don't monitor students' works which they are entitled to. Only 29% teachers move around to observe students' works and one-third (33%) of them listen students' queries and provide advices. Teachers praise students' works in classroom and use appreciative words to students' for success. " Teachers' reaction when questions answered incorrectly

Students cannot answer properly everyday and they give wrong answer or avoid answering. When students answered incorrectly teachers punish them or asked reasons for not answering. The common nature of punishment is physical punishment, scolds verbally, keeps standing, etc. Few students get another chance to answer and teachers help to answer correctly. Sometimes teachers repeat the lessons in class and suggest reading again at home.

Figure 7: Teacher's reaction while students answered incorrectly
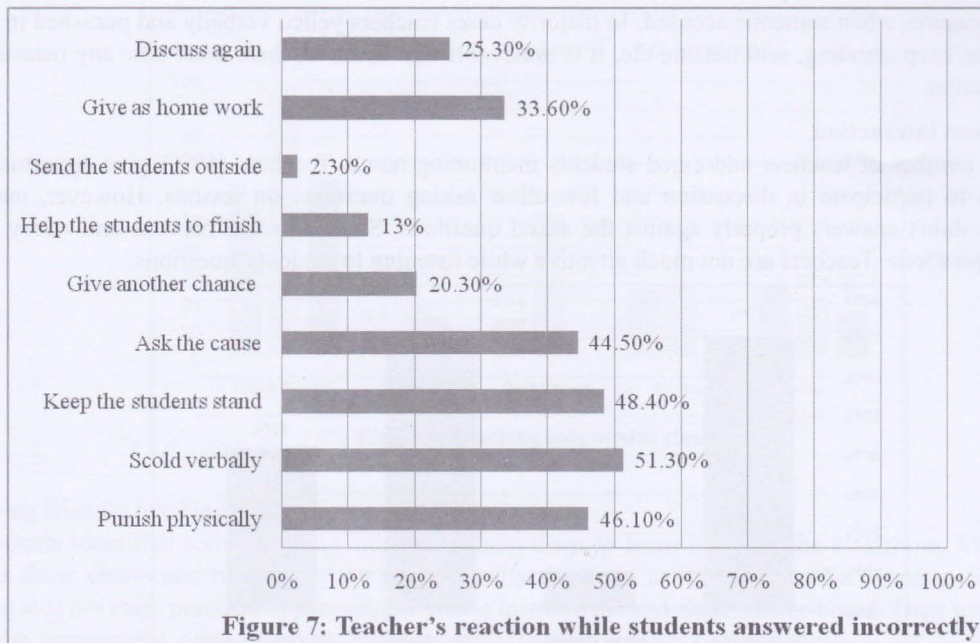
8. Results and discussion

Teachers deliver lessons with a combination of several approaches while teaching at secondary classrooms. They share experiences, discuss familiar issues, and tell stories in relation with class lessons. Teachers usually provide several supports for slow learners in academic purposes. These motivate students to attend school regularly and complete their tasks (Koh, 2007). Concentration on low achievers' academic motivation is also helpful to decrease dropout from schools (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meege 2008).

Although majority students think charts and real things are most friendly, teachers use traditional aids (chalkboard) which makes classroom unfriendliness (Okebukola, 2000). He argued that the unfriendliness environment is induced by equipment and teaching/learning materials; poorly motivated teachers; and use of poor teaching methodologies.

It surprisingly revealed that some students are physically harassed or verbally abused by their friend which indicates poor peer relationship at school. It is also found that teachers are not friendly to all students. However, ensuring student friendly classroom is essential for ensuring the quality education and positive learning for students (UNESCO, 2001). A good teacher-student relationship is superior to the creation and maintenance of a positive classroom environment (Goh & Khine, 2002). If the relationship is weak at school, the weaker students would never request teacher's advice when they face problem in study (Wei & Elias, 2011).

Teachers assess students' everyday learning during class in majority schools and some teachers provide feedback to students. However, majority teachers didn't answers properly against the asked questions.

9. Conclusion

Classroom environment is the main place where students' learning can be ensured. The environment such as the physical, emotional and aesthetic characteristics of classroom tend to enhance student attitude towards learning. However, this is not properly considered by classroom teachers everywhere which reduce achievement and other development of students. This study suggests that learning friendly environment in each classroom should be ensured to enhance quality education at secondary schools.

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