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Impact of Different Teaching Methodologies and Student Peer Relations on the Socio-Emotional Abilities of Children: A Comparative Study Between Closed and Open Classrooms for 8-10 Age Group

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Abstract

Socio-emotional development is one of the key stages of child development milestones that prepare them for life. Children shape the society of our future and it's imperative to be cognizant of the impact we have on their development through our classroom environment, teacher presence or methodologies, and student peer relations. The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of different teaching practices and student relations in two different types of classroom cultures or environments on middle-aged children. This information will be used to infer some of the best classroom practices to ensure good classroom behaviour, student participation, ownership, learning, and socio-emotional development. To analyze this impact, comparative analysis methodology is used to critique different teacher practices and student relations in an open and closed classroom environment, where there have been assumptions made on the two classroom environments. It studies the alignment of different teacher practices with the different child development milestones and helps in inferring a suitable classroom practice. Lastly, this paper infers that any class should be using a blend of a variety of different teaching practices and student peer relations to have a sustainable classroom learning culture that caters to the socio-emotional development of the middle age students.

Keywords: *socio-emotional learning, teachers, student-peer relations, open classroom, closed classroom*

1.0 Introduction

One out of every three out-of-school children in the world resides in India. Fifty-three per cent of students drop out before completing primary school. The issue today is not a lack of demand, but rather the quality of supply. Students often drop out because their public school experiences are often so poor that they learn very little even after being enrolled for 4 to 5 years. (Indian Education Report, n.d.-b) According to a study by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), Socio-Emotional-Learning abilities equip students with the power of being aware of themselves (self-awareness), managing and regulating their feelings,

emotions, and overall behaviour (self-management), developing social awareness, interpersonal skills, and relationship-building skills, lastly, it enables them to make well-informed decisions by considering diverse perspectives. (What Is SEL, n.d.)

There was an increase in the academic performance of the students who had SEL interventions by 11 percentile, there was also an improvement in the classroom behaviour, ability to deal with stress, and building better attitudes for themselves and the people around them. (Benefits of SEL, n.d.) By showing the impact of teacher practices and student peer relations in a closed and open classroom structure with the assumptions made about these two classroom structures, there is an indirect evaluation of the impact of teacher practices and student peer relations on the classroom behaviour, students ability to manage stress and depression, and ability to create better attitudes. about themselves, others, and school.

In this paper, the impact of teacher practices and student peer relations in a closed and open classroom on students' self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and decision-making abilities of the age group of 8-10 years is compared using comparative analysis methodology.

2.0 Open and Closed Classrooms

An open classroom setting eliminates a hierarchical approach to education in which the students are perceived to be at the receiving end of the classroom whereas, parents and teachers are considered to be at the giving end of the classroom; a setting that promotes support, and inculcates individuality, ownership, logical thinking in students. It eliminates the concept of peer competition and a classroom setting that fosters more peer-to-peer learning is taken as the definition of an open classroom in this paper.

Highlighting the key elements of an open classroom:

- A. No traditional classroom setting
- B. The teacher isn't at the forefront of the class making dictations of things to do and not to do
- C. Students are moving around freely, making connections with their peers, taking up projects

On the other hand, a closed classroom is one that follows traditional classroom rules and restrictions wherein, the teacher imparts knowledge to the students with minimal interaction and brainstorming sessions, basically, following the hierarchical approach to education. The parental and teacher interactions are limited to fixed Parent Teacher Meetings throughout the year and students are expected to grasp knowledge based on the curriculum designed for all the students. This has been taken as a definition of a closed classroom in this paper.

Highlighting the key elements of a closed classroom:

- A. A traditional classroom setting with a teacher at the forefront of the classroom
- B. Class is listening and taking notes
- C. They take notes on the different assignments
- D. Note down the homework
- E. The teacher answers a few questions

These are assumptions made about an open and closed classroom (Open v. Closed Classrooms, 1962)

3.0 Development Stages in the Childhood Among 8-10 Year-Olds

There are different development milestones in human beings, these are classified mainly as physical growth, motor skills, cognitive development, socio-emotional development, and moral development. (Middle Childhood Development, n.d.)

1. *Physical development:* During the middle childhood years (8-12 years of age), children start developing their fine motor skills. They go through bodily changes and even though these changes are similar in boys and girls in the initial stages, it tends to vary in the later stages as and when they hit puberty. (Middle Childhood Development, n.d.) They often find it difficult to understand these bodily changes. To make this process easy for them, they should be allowed to question things happening to and around them. Their questions shouldn't be put out by the adults in close contact with them (mostly the teachers and

parents). During this phase in life, they would need caregivers who are willing to be patient with them and adults who tell them the fact-based truth and not what society believes to be true. Now more than ever, the teachers have to be cognizant of the impact their teaching practices and methodologies have on the children. The student peers need to understand that they are not the only ones going through these changes and that it makes them uniquely similar to each other.

2. *Cognitive development*: Cognition is the way the brain thinks, and it includes awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment. According to Piaget's development theory, this stage is also known as the "Concrete Operational" stage. The child is no longer dependent on his or her perception or sensory cues to make sense of the surroundings and answer questions that require logical facts. (CONCRETE OPERATIONAL STAGE OF PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY: AN IMPLICATION IN LEARNING MATHEMATICS Safda, 2016) To help the students develop their cognitive skills to the fullest, their surroundings need to push them to exercise more logical thinking, conflict resolution, reasoning, and reflective abilities.
3. *Moral Development*: The middle childhood age of children is an important point of influx into human socialization. They begin to acquire moral development and moral values. The development of social relations and communication with peers becomes an important aspect of their moral development. According to Kohlberg, children early in their middle childhood stage of development will typically display "Preconventional" moral reasoning. Children displaying pre-conventional moral reasoning have internalized basic culturally prescribed rules governing right and wrong behaviour. (Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, n.d.). For instance, they will appreciate that it is immoral to steal from others; you must earn or be given things and not simply take them. Children will tend to live by these rules but primarily for selfish reasons, as a way of avoiding punishment and obtaining praise for themselves. At this point, they will appreciate their ability to make different kinds of choices, and also the reality of consequences associated with those

choices. They realize that morally good behaviours attract praise and positive regard from peers and adults, while morally bad choices bring about unpleasant consequences and negative regard. They act accordingly, in a hedonistic manner to maximize their pleasant consequences. As students enter the stage of ideal reciprocity, they start treating others the way they would want others to treat them. Lastly, there is the stage of personal choice, which involves rules that are not fixed by society but are based on personal preferences (Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development, n.d.). While in school, students go through the different stages of moral development and they need to experience a classroom environment that fosters complete moral development in them.

4. *Socio-Emotional Development*: Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. It caters to developing five core competencies in children, Self-awareness, Social awareness, Self-management, Relationship management skills, and decision-making abilities. (What Is SEL? n.d.)

As the students in the age group of 8 to 10 years begin to have a developing understanding of their constantly growing physical body, cognitive skills, and moral development, they need to have a safe learning environment around them to help them make the most sense out of what they are going through.

4.0 Comparative Analysis of Open and Closed Classrooms

4.1 Impact of Different Teaching Practices and Methodologies in an Open and Closed Classroom

Teacher practices are teacher actions that ensure classroom management and student learning. There are a variety of teacher practices such as, inquiry-based teaching i.e. teacher practices that promote teacher approachability, and direct instruction-based teaching i.e. teacher practices that promote limited student-teacher interaction and behaviour regulation.

1. Open classrooms are those with a minimal setup of a hierarchical form of education and with the application of inquiry-based teacher practice which essentially means to ask thought-provoking questions and build logical reasoning in students. The students in these classrooms are more likely to have discussions with their peers, share their thoughts and opinions, and apply their developing knowledge of cognitive skills. However, in a closed classroom environment and with the application of direct instruction teaching practice, students follow a specific classroom structure which helps in maintaining decorum in the class, students develop societal moral values in the process and get to learn what the teacher and curriculum have to offer. Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners increasingly realize that engaging students as active participants in conversations in classrooms are central to the development of their skills and understanding. The U.S. Common Core Standards for Mathematical Practice calls for students at all grades to be able to “construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others”, which includes students justifying their conclusions, communicating them to others, listening to the arguments of others, responding to the arguments of others, deciding whether they make sense, and asking useful questions to clarify or improve the arguments. (Engaging with Others’ Mathematical Ideas: Interrelationships among Student Participation, Teachers’ Instructional Practices, and Learning, n.d.)

2. In an open classroom where the teacher practices and promotes approachability, students feel a sense of belonging. Classrooms with warm teacher-child relationships facilitate deeper learning among students, and when children feel comfortable with their teachers and peers, they are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks (A National Scan of Teacher Preparation and Social & Emotional Learning, 2017) On the other hand, in a closed classroom, with teacher-student interaction being limited to the classroom academic curriculum, it makes it difficult for the teachers to create spaces that would help the students be more self-aware and socially aware. This, in turn, leads to poor management of their socio-emotional abilities. A study was conducted on 370 children from the third to fifth grades from different regular elementary classrooms across the Netherlands. The aim was to study direct and indirect contributions of students' understanding of the quality of student-teacher relationships (i.e. closeness and conflict) to their abilities of self-regulation and basic reading and math skills in middle childhood. It was found that the quality of the student-teacher relationship is associated with students' ability to regulate their learning. ("Students' Self-Regulation and Achievement in Basic Reading and Math Skills: The Role of Student-Teacher Relationships in Middle Childhood," 2016) Firstly, students who were close to their teachers were likely to be found focusing on mastering their learning tasks and making use of metacognitive strategies in class.

Notably, closeness explained more variance in task motivation than in metacognitive strategy use, suggesting that warm and nurturing student-teacher relationships may be particularly important for motivational domains of self-regulation. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the student-teacher relationship quality is, in part, a reflection of students' social adjustment in class and therefore more proximal to motivational and behavioural aspects of students' learning than to cognitive features ("Students' Self-Regulation and Achievement in Basic Reading and Math Skills: The Role of Student-Teacher Relationships in Middle Childhood," 2016)

Secondly, it was found that students with relational conflict were found to be negatively associated with their task orientation. (“Students’ Self-Regulation and Achievement in Basic Reading and Math Skills: The Role of Student-Teacher Relationships in Middle Childhood,” 2016)

4.2 Impact of Student Peer Relations on the Middle Childhood Ages in an Open and Closed Classroom

According to Henry Stack Sullivan, during the middle childhood years, with the growing demand for interpersonal relations, students tend to make friends or confidant with same-sex students. (Peer Relations and Learning, n.d.) As they are beginning to understand the changes in their body and mind, they might feel different in class without even realizing that their peers are also going through something similar. According to Abraham.H.Maslow, love and belongingness is a step towards achievement in his hierarchy of motivation model which he described in 1954. The ability to learn is built on a foundation of comfortable relationships with others, including peers and family, and classroom learning is all about learning with and in the presence of others. (Peer Relations and Learning, n.d.)

In the structure of an open classroom where the teacher facilitates more student peer interaction, students tend to develop their social awareness and relationship-building competencies of Socio-Emotional Learning. However, in a closed classroom, with minimal student-teacher and student-student interaction, the need for love and belongingness for achieving motivation might not be fulfilled thereby influencing the student performance in class. According to Behaviourism, Peer relations impact learning among students only as much as they reinforce each other in the academic arena. (Peer Relations and Learning, n.d.) In an open classroom, with the freedom to explore, if the teacher fails to set up basic student-teacher expectations in the classroom, it might start affecting the classroom management and eventually the performance of the students. Due to lack of expectation setting, students might begin to misuse the freedom bestowed upon them to

have conversations that would jeopardize their learning levels, whereas, in a closed classroom setting, students are made to follow certain fixed classroom rules that ensure that the content pieces are delivered efficiently by the teacher through direct instruction and limited time for a question-answer session with the teacher.

5.0 Conclusion

While common belief suggests that the lack of demand for education is the root cause of students dropping out of school, according to the Indian education report of 2005 (NCEE, 2005), it is the lack of good quality of education that makes public school experiences invaluable for students. The paper studies the impact of different teacher practices or methodologies and student peer relations on the socio-emotional learning of middle childhood ages (8-10 years). It talks about the different physical, cognitive, moral, and socio-emotional stages of development in middle childhood ages, highlighting the requirements and needs of the children. It assumes two different types of classroom settings and environments, open and closed classrooms. Open classrooms are the ones eliminating hierarchical forms of education, students can move freely around the classroom, starting their projects and solving problems. It promotes a sense of individuality and ownership in the students. On the other hand, closed classrooms are the ones with a traditional approach, with class rules, teacher talking and giving instructions to the students, students listening, making notes, and accepting the curriculum as it is without applying reasoning and logic.

A comparative analysis on different types of teacher practices and methodologies and their impact on the socio-emotional learning of middle age children reveals that even though inquiry-based teaching helps in making students self-aware of their thoughts, make them participative in class, and enables their critical thinking, problem-solving capabilities and develop their cognitive skills. This results in thereby developing all five competencies of Socio-emotional development, there may be times when the teacher would have to apply direct instruction strategy

to get them to practice fact-based questions, maintain a flow in terms of learning and internalize certain concepts. It would be ideal to apply a mixture of both these strategies and not any one of them exclusively.

Another comparison of case studies on the teacher practices that promote teacher approachability and the ones that promote limited teacher-student interaction reveals that a student's motivation level and performance is affected by their closeness to the teacher. It is recommended for the teachers to show interest in the learning of their students to develop a sense of belonging in them and for them to find their safe space within the classroom. However, they should build certain boundaries with the students to respect the student-teacher relationship.

A comparative analysis on the different types of student peer relations and their impact on the socio-emotional learning of the middle childhood ages reveals that the ability to learn is built on a foundation of comfortable relationships with others, including peers and family, and classroom learning is all about learning with and in the presence of others. A classroom structure that supports more peer-to-peer interactions helps them develop their relationship-building skills. As they acquire diverse perspectives from children of their age, they become more self-aware by acknowledging their personal choices and also socially aware by empathizing and building relationships with others. However, teachers should make sure to set clear expectations with the students, after-action steps for failing to meet these expectations, and develop ownership in themselves to regulate their behaviour. Peer relations impact learning among students only as much as they reinforce each other in the academic arena.

6.0 Limitations

This paper talks about the two key aspects impacting classroom culture and socio-emotional development in the students. However, it doesn't cater to the impact of parental relations with children, which indirectly influences the classroom environment. Parents and teachers are the closest adults for the students and it becomes imperative to analyze our behaviour around them. This paper has also not taken into the picture the current reality that is

the COVID-19 Pandemic. More than ever, we need to analyze parent-student relations because students spend all of their middle childhood years with their parents. This paper didn't include the impact of teacher presence and student relations in an online setting and how that is affecting the socio-emotional development of middle age students.

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