

Learning Environments: A Comparative Study of Orphan and Non-Orphan Children

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Abstract— Learning environment is very essential and plays a pivotal role in developing and nurturing the psychological and cognitive growth of the children. Through this study a conscious effort has been done to examine and estimate the dimensions of learning environment on the basis of comparison done of the differences and similarities in background, individual experiences and emotional growth of both the orphan and non- orphan children. Furthermore, how these factors significantly make an impact and affect the mental well- being. The study emphasises on aspects like – environment at home, family support, school background, teacher– student rapport, peer interaction, opportunities, facilities and learning resources. The factor that is highlighted the most in the entire study is the fact that the family background, the parents and support of immediate family is a factor that finely carves the child emotionally and psychologically from the very initial years of childhood. The data was collected from orphan and non-orphan children, with the use of observational methods and comparative approach. Sampling and standardized questionnaires were used to collect the required statistics. On the basis of collected data and observation, the findings are indicative of that the non-orphan children are usually benefitted because of stable homely support, on the other hand, the orphan children are deprived of the family support ,have to simply depend on institutional care and support of the care givers. Parental care and guidance, rapport with the teachers, positive relations with the peers can enhance learning outcomes for both groups. The study points toward the significance of comprehensive and supportive learning environments for both the groups. This will not only help to promote fair educational equity but improve and enhance the psychological and emotional well-being of orphan children. It is subsequently a social responsibility to take an initiative to improve and maintain the psychological well-being of the orphan children who are an integral part of this society. The results are indicative of better opportunities, committed involvement, well defined policies and efficient measures that are essential to bridge gaps in learning environment and opportunities ensuring holistic psychological and cognitive growth for all children.

Index Terms— learning, environment, development, education, communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Not all children are blessed and fortunate enough to have parents and a heavenly safe home through their valuable journey of childhood. It is the parents who help the child lay the firm and secure basis in the process of qualitative growth. Parents play a very substantial role in shaping and fostering child's emotional, moral, social nurturing and development.

Parent's inquisitive attention and care for their wards, right from the beginning of early growing years, keeps the child motivated, concerned, confident and keenly interested in learning. But the orphan children often lack and miss the emotional and moral support, which they try to find among the people around them. Parental care helps to establish a strong foundation of bond between the child and the parent. Parent's interest and involvement in the child's activities, discussions about school not only develops a close relation, but boosts the interest of child towards learning as well as develops a considerate coordination between child and parents. Parent's attentiveness and awareness for child, helps to build their concentration level and interest in learning. Parents from their busy routine life spare some quality time for their children. Quality time is when the child can comfortably share thoughts, feelings and interests and that helps the parents to truly understand the child and thereupon strengthening their bond. On the other hand, the schools play a vital role and contribute towards active involvement of parents in the child's development process. Extensively, the activities where both the parent-child are involved, help the parents observe and keep a track of the progress of their child's learning. It is important for parents to be helpful in providing an indulgent learning environment at home. Parental care and moral support pave the way and the child grows more dynamic in attitude and approach. A well-developed positive attitude towards life is an essential factor for a child's development which helps the child to think independently and more creatively. One of the author's as per reference has remarked: Family is an important constituent and a part child's education. For the betterment of child's cognitive mindset and emotional growth, providing a positive and happy growing environment is extremely beneficial. It is a prime role and responsibility of parents to ensure that the child is provided with enjoyable learning environment in their growing years. One of the authors states, "Supportive parenting is assumed to lead to the acceptance of parental values, and thus, enhances moral sensitivity and sympathy towards others" (Grusec, 2011). [1] One of the most valued assistances that the parent can give their children is the moral support through recognizing and positive acceptance of their qualities. It totally depends on accepting the child the way he or she is. It is the parent's belief in the child which will induce the confidence and morale that the child very much needs at every step of initial stages of growing life. Encouragement and emotional presence can go a longer way sowing the seeds of confidence and positive attitude in the child. And therefore, as stated in reference: "Encourage and support your kids because they live up to what you believe of them." [2] A child not only needs support but the belief of parents in the child in itself is a way to support the child which gives the child a sense of mental security. A supportive environment of love, affection and encouragement can play a valuable role in helping the parents inculcate interest directing towards their right development. Among all stake holders, parent's involvement and encouragement in many respects always results into a strong positive effect for the child's psychological and emotional growth. Long-time educator, Larry Ferlazzo has written "while parent's involvement often involves one-way communication, parent engagement involves two-way conversations. These conversations occur not just through formal communication but through telephonic communication detailing about all the activities about their child and other school activities." [3] The factor of prime importance for an encouraging home environment is the care and supervision and positive ideal family system. One of the author has stated, "The family system is defined as the primary socialization setting and parenting practices are viewed as key drivers for children's educational success (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)." [4] On the other hand orphan children often lack parental support, which plays a potent role in a child's overall development and learning. The absence of parents definitely has an undesirable impact on the cognitive, emotional and intellectual development which is likely to impact the self-confidence of the child making it weaker. Such children feel abandoned and neglected in this social world. Unlike non-orphan children, who usually receive continuous support, encouragement, supervision, and care from parents at home, orphan children rely mainly on institutional caregivers or support of teachers. "Parental sensitivity (i.e., appropriate reciprocal social exchange), mutuality, synchrony, stimulation, positive attitude, and emotional support are related to secure attachment." [5] Limited personal attention and support, absence of emotional bonding, and lack of academic guidance has an adverse impact on their learning. As a result, orphan children face challenges such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, resulting into lower academic performance. Thus, providing opportunities, positive learning environment and required resources to some extent, help to compensate the absence of parental support and encourage the holistic development of orphan children. Therefore, one of the author remarked, "If a child lives with criticism, He learns to condemn. If a child lives with hostility, He learns to fight. If a child lives with acceptance, He learns to like himself. If a child lives with encouragement, He learns to be confident. If a child lives with parental support, He can touch the sky". [6]

Factors affecting Home Based - Learning Environment

- Close relationship between parents and children
- Communication amongst the parents and children

- Feeling of love and affection
- Positive acceptance of child's abilities
- Showing interest and eagerness in child's development
- Addressing the doubts and queries
- Inculcating human values and morals
- Motivation to the children
- Teaching social skills in the child
- Boosting morale and confidence

II. RATIONALE OF RESEARCH

The learning environment is a significant factor which influences a child's cognitive and psychological development which has an overall bearing on learning and all-round development. Children need utmost emotional support, guidance, encouragement, effective engagement in learning activities which helps to instill interest among the children. For most non-orphan children, this support is primarily provided by parents. However, orphan children often grow up without parental care and supervision, which may create differences in their learning opportunities and thereby experiences. A careful understanding and studying these differences are essential for promoting educational equity. Orphan children on the other hand are more likely to face emotional, social, and psychological challenges due to the absence of parental care and emotional support. These challenges can negatively affect the psychological growth but also the level of concentration, motivation, and academic performance. In contrast, non-orphan children generally benefit from a stable home environment that strengthens and reinforces the learning and making learning more appreciating and elated. In spite of these differences, research has critically and systematically compared the learning environments of both the orphan and non-orphan children, in relation to family support systems and educational resources. This research is undertaken to examine and compare the learning environments and backgrounds of orphan and non-orphan children, and to identify the factors that influence their learning experience and environment. The findings of this study will help educators, caregivers, and policymakers understand not only the challenges but providing an insight which is intended for the specific basic needs of orphan children. And this would result in designing supportive policies and interventions. By highlighting gaps and strengths in existing learning environments, the study aims to contribute to the development of comprehensive educational practices that will ensure equal learning opportunities and environment for all children without any discrimination.

III. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

Interviews and discussions were scheduled to collect the primary information about the challenges faced by both the orphans and non-orphans with regards to effective learning environment. A sample size of fifty orphans and fifty non-orphan children aged between 11 to 15 years of age were taken into consideration. The research tool comprises of the open and close-ended questions:

Questions asked from the non-orphan children during the discussion:

- How is the learning environment at home?
- Do you share all the information about the school activities?
- Do your parents accompany you for studies?
- Do your parents help you to solve problems that you come across?
- Do your parents help you in completing home assignments?
- Do your parents spend time with you?
- Do they help you in reading activity?
- Do you have friends to share your thoughts?

Questions asked to Orphan Children:

- Do you have a quiet place where you can study?
- Are the study materials and resources easily available?
- Do the care givers encourage you to study regularly?
- Is there a fix time for study every day?
- Is there anyone who helps you when you face difficulties in study?
- Do you receive guidance for home work and examinations?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions in class?
- Do you have someone to share your problems and seek for suggestions?

Do you have friends to share your thoughts?

Discussion and interviews were conducted with the parents interpret their opinion and to understand the importance of supportive to learning atmosphere. Following questions were asked during the discussion:

How much time do you spend with your child?

Do you communicate with your child?

Do you listen and understand their problems?

How do you handle the mistakes of your child?

Do you notice the behavioural change in your child?

Are you aware of your child's friends?

Do you accept your child the way he or she is?

How do you react to your child's failure?

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The data for the present study was collected from three different groups: orphan children(n=50), non-orphan children(n=50), and parents(n=50), using questionnaires based on the learning environment and the factors affecting it. The obtained responses were carefully studied ,classified, and tabulated for systematic analysis and research. Both quantitative and descriptive methods were used to analyze the collected data. Responses from orphan and non-orphan children were estimated separately to find differences and comparisons in their learning environments. For each question, regularities and percentages were calculated to understand the responses. Comparative analysis was carried out to examine differences between orphan and non-orphan children in terms of parental care ,support of caregivers and the prevalent learning conditions. Data collected from parents was analyzed to understand the involvement of parents in the process of psychological and emotional development and the learning environment.

Responses were summarized on the basis of data and information collected from parents related to academic guidance, emotional support, availability and provision of study materials and resources, and communication with teachers. This helped in assessing key aspects such as availability of learning opportunities and resources, academic support, teacher encouragement, peer interaction, and motivation towards learning. The comparison and classification of these findings were done with respect to children's responses and the analysis of gaps between parental perceptions and children's expectations and experiences. And more focus was on gaps in learning environment and opportunities of orphan and non- orphan children collectively. The analysis of the available data is presented in the form of table for clear and simple interpretation and representation. The results provide an understanding of the fact that there is a noticeable difference in learning environment of orphan and non-orphan children. Home, parental care and support are essential for psychological and emotional growth of the children. The below table I shows that the orphan children lack support of home whereas the non-orphan children are privileged to be seek the support of parents.

TABLE I: AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT AT HOME / INSTITUTION

Category of Respondents	Yes	Percentage (%)	No	Percentage (%)
Orphan Children (n=50)	28	56%	22	44%
Non-Orphan Children (n=50)	42	84%	8	16%

As per table II, depicts that parent's involvement in monitoring, helping the child with home-work and their communication is often more.

TABLE II: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING (PARENTS' RESPONSES)

Aspect of Involvement	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)
Monitoring study time	72%	18%	10%
Helping with home work	68%	22%	10%
Communication with teachers	60%	20%	15%

V. FINDINGS

Analysis was done on the basis of the collected data and observation from orphan and non-orphan children. The following were the key outcomes:

- As the non-orphan children have a supportive home and learning environment, active involvement of parents which is helpful for psychological and emotional growth of the children. .

- Orphan children have limited access to resources and have to largely depend on institutional care and caregivers.
- As compared to non-orphan children, the ratio of orphan children was higher regarding the available resources like study materials, quiet study spaces, and guidance for homework. Etc.
- Student – student rapport and motivated learning environment plays a significant role in enhancing learning outcomes for both orphan and non-orphan children.
- Another factor of prime importance is peer support, specifically among orphan children.
- Orphan children with access to caring and supportive caregivers, resources at school results into improved performance.
- Variations and difference in access to learning resources, such as libraries and digital tools, were observed between the two groups, with greater access to non-orphan children.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the significant difference in the learning environments of both the orphan and non-orphan children. The findings clearly indicate that parental support often plays an extensive role in shaping a child's learning experiences and lays a foundation for cognitive, emotional and psychological development of a child. Home is a place where the seeds of growth are sown, so that the child flourishes as a strong rational and intellectual individual. Non- orphan children generally benefit from a stable and supportive home environment, which positively influences their learning and academic performance. On the other hand, orphan children often face challenges due to the absence of parental care, limited individual affection ,attention , care, and restricted access to learning resources. The study also brings out fact that a productive environment at home or institutional care units, caring and encouraging teachers, and good peer rapport can help in minimizing the challenges faced by the orphan children. Institutional care units and well- developed educational support system can help in creating and promoting better opportunities and learning environment. Hence, it is an essential requirement that the stake holders like-institutional care takers, schools and policy makers should take efforts to strengthen and work for the betterment of orphan children. Equal opportunities and supportive learning environment will ensure psychological and emotional growth leading towards holistic development of all children. Orphan children can be a part of the main stream of society so that they too can live a normal human life. Learning should be a joyful and enriching learning experience but not a pressured burden.

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