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Child-Friendly School Environment: A Case of Community Schools of Pokhara

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ABSTRACT

The study is carried out to investigate the status of child-friendly school environment, and identify school's policy towards it. It was delimited to Pokhara Metropolitan of Kaski District. To accomplish the objectives, the explanatory sequential research design was used. The survey technique was used for quantitative and observation was used to qualitative study. There were 128 basic community schools. Eleven schools were selected randomly. The interview schedule and observation checklist were the major tools of data collection. Collected data and information were analyzed both quantitatively as well as qualitatively as per their nature in the table. The findings of the study demonstrated that physical facilities in community schools in Pokhara Metropolitan City seem satisfactory. The researcher asked and observed the school sites. More than one quarter schools (27.3%) had peace and quiet place to teach. More than one-third school (36.4%) had satisfactory and the same (36.4%) had no open and enough space. The study also found that all schools had little raised and dry land and not to risk of sinking during the monsoon. More than half of the schools (54.5%) had the satisfactory situation on sufficient space and on adequate water and facility of waste disposal. From the observation, it was found that nearly two third schools had poor situation of restrooms without water and latches. It is concluded that the community schools tried their best to make child-friendly school environment, but those attempts were found to be insufficient. The study recommended that communication, cooperation, and coordination are needed among the stakeholders to plan for the quality education in schools.

KEYWORDS: Child-friendly school environment, community schools, physical facilities

INTRODUCTION

A Child-Friendly School (CFS) is a school that recognizes and nurtures the achievement of children's basic rights. It is the school where emphasis is put on all-round developments of the child in the free and fearless environment. Every child has the right to go to the school where he or she gets security and friendly environment. Generally, the people who have not crossed the age of 16 in Nepal, 18 in UK, France and America, and 20 in Japan are called children. However, the article one (A) of convention on the right of the child states that "the children below 18 unless the national law does not fix the

minimum age of children are considered to be children" (Bhattarai, 2020). Internationally recognized definitions refer to chronological age is often set at 18 years. Childhood is a universal biologically and psychologically determined phase of human development. In the context of Nepal, children are those humans who are under sixteen years.

In 1832, Horace Mann advocated a need of training on health education. France is the first country for making law to clean school environment and be responsible for safety of the children. Child development and child health were given priority from 1880 to 1920. Thomas, D. Wood, father of health education, started "professional preparation on personal hygiene in Colombia University of America in 1901" (Budathoki & Wagle, 2015). Children were the backbone of the nation in coming days so they need to provide sound environment of learning. This concept was highly communicated in the decade of 1970 by Anderson et.al. Similarly, the school health program was one of the major contents in Bachelor and Master of Health education from the beginning to now.

UNICEF (2020) said that around 770,000 children aged 5-12 years are still out of school. Attendance in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is still low at 51 percent. There is inequity in the education sector as only 12 percent of children from the lowest wealth quintile are on track of literacy and compared to 65 percent from the highest wealth quintile. Very few schools meet child-friendly school standards. Only 11 percent of school buildings are earthquake resistance structures. Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) are educational units which respect children's rights and protect children from violence, discrimination, and other mistreatment as well as support children's participation, especially in planning, policy, learning and have the right of complaints (Endro, 2014; as cited in Ningsih, 2020). These data arouse the question that what is the condition of our schools, their facilities and the plans of coming days.

Government of Nepal (2010) claimed that while preparing and publishing the child-friendly manual that sound physical condition plays an important role in imparting quality education. Financial resources are important for improving physical condition of schools. Infrastructures need to be attractive, safe, durable, and friendly to children, disabled, boys, and girls. For this purpose, awareness, vision, skills, and commitment of stakeholders are needed. From the perspective of child-friendly environment, the physical infrastructures in the schools are not found to be child-friendly to the desired level with an adverse effect on imparting of quality education. Even buildings constructed by spending a large amount of money are found to be weak, unsafe, and non-child-friendly due to absence of design, supervision, and advice by skilled technicians. Similarly, furniture items in schools are either too low or too high, or too big or too small, lack of finishing and are likely to injure pupils. As far as other physical aspects are concerned, the layout, design, construction, etc. are not found to be done by keeping in mind the interest of children.

Likewise, it is very necessary to adopt appropriate protective measures for children. Healthy and safe environment in school and classrooms is needed. Provision of safe and pure drinking water, clean toilet and drainage, snacks or mid-day meal and so on are needed. The child-friendly school must protect children from potential accidents such as by filling up pits and drenches, making walls or fences around the school, making provision for first aid, and managing the electric circuit well. In this way, children can be protected from potential accidents and injuries. Furthermore, along with adopting measures for safety from earthquakes and other natural disasters and training all students and teachers to overcome from possible accidents, a child-friendly school should collaborate with families and the community for the health, safety and protection of children. It is because the health of children also depends on the environment outside the school.

Cooperation, coordination, and communication between community and school are needed to plan for quality education in the schools. Both school and community are interrelated because the community established school to teach their children with their efforts. Similarly, the schools provide knowledge, attitude, and practice to their students to compete in the changing environment of the world. Both had the aim to make the children capable, good citizens, adjustable manpower, social qualities, and so on. As a result, they help each other as community provides or manages all the facilities that schools need and the schools provide the quality education to the community and the children, which made independent and capable through well-furnished knowledge, attitude, and practice. The government should help the community schools to improve quality education. For developing plan of school's facilities, all sectors like architecture engineer, health educationist, community leaders, chairman of School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA), headmaster, etc. need to communicate and prepare plan in developed countries but such practices are not available in Nepal as a result infrastructures could not be as child-friendly.

Pokhara Metropolitan City (2019) made the map book and flashed out that the metropolitan city is the biggest metropolitan city in Nepal in terms of geographic area. The metropolitan city is a melting point of various cultures, religions, with historical monuments dating as far back as the second century. It has beautiful natural sceneries with high Himalayas, lakes, and caves around the city. There were 223 community schools (128 basic schools and 72 secondary schools rest 12 were merged), 68 Montessori and 205 institutes in 33 wards of Pokhara Metropolitan City (PMC, 2019).

Some researchers like Baidhya (1982), Gauli (1992), Devkota (1995), Tripathi (2001), Regmi (2013), Neupane (2019) and so on had done research on school health programs related subject matters but provision of child-friendly schools had not done yet although it is a burning issue in the world. The government of Nepal started its program from 2006 with the help of UNICEF (2017). It is the time of evaluating its effectiveness. The teachers should know the questions such as the conditions of our government schools, especially on child friendly school and how these aspects will be improved in the future so the researcher wants to find out the conditions of child-friendly schools in Pokhara Metropolitan City. Thus, the present problem is stated as "Child-friendly environment: A case of community schools of Pokhara". The specific objectives of this study were as follows.

- i. To find out the status of child-friendly school in selected community schools in the study area.
- ii. To analyze the plans towards child-friendly schools in selected community schools in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the explanatory sequential design, using a mixed method, which consisted of merging, integrating, linking, and varying data of both quantitative and qualitative. In this design, quantitative data had more weight which was taken from interview schedule with closed-type questions. After that the researcher observed physical facilities of the school to evaluate the answers or data taken from the interview and interpret the situation as finding from the observation too. The study was conducted among the entire community schools of Pokhara Metropolitan City and based on primary and secondary sources of information. All 128 basic community schools of Pokhara Metropolitan City were the population of the study. Multi-stage sampling techniques had been used. Pokhara Metropolitan City was selected through the convenience sampling method. Eleven schools were selected randomly. Headmasters were interviewed with the

help of interview schedule and qualitative data were taken from the observation. Interview schedule and checklist were the major tools of data collection. The researcher asked questions during the interview and observed the same thing to find out the real situation of the schools. The interview schedule and checklist were pretested in similar schools and feedback was taken from the experts and the mentor to make the tools more valid and reliable. The headmasters were interviewed after the researcher got permission from the respective headmasters. The researcher had also taken permission to observe the physical facilities. The various materials such as books, journals, and reports of, NGOs and INGOs were consulted for relevant information. Data from interview schedule were reviewed and computed using the Statistical Process of Social Science (SPSS) to prepare automatic tables with number and percentage. Necessary comparison was done with other researchers' findings and conclusions. The respondents' information was treated in confidence and used solely for the purpose of this study only.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher collected data to find out the situation and plans towards child-friendly schools. The researcher took interview with the headmasters and identified the reality from the observation. The result and its discussion were as follows.

School Profile

The school profile is the study of human population and the social condition of a school. The composition of population, size, distribution, changing in number, etc. is studied. According to Ministry of Education (2017), data provided by Gandaki Province showed that the teacher student ratio in class one to five is twelve and one to eight is fifteen.

Table 1
School Profile

Particulars	Male Number	Male Percent	Female Number	Female Percent	Total Number
Students	546	46.6	625	53.4	1171
Teachers	36	36.7	62	62.3	98
Staff	4	23.5	13	76.5	17
Total	586	45.5	700	55.5	1286

Table 1 shows that females were more than males in basic schools. There were 1171 students, 98 teachers and 17 staffs. Females were 55.5 percent out of total of students, teachers, and staff. The student-teacher ratio seems odd in the sense that there were six students in four classes of a basic school where three teachers and a staff were working and on the other hand 370 students 20 teachers and two staff were in a school. The government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, had the policy of merging schools and some community schools were going to be closed due to lack of students. The political system of Nepal and local level politics are hindrances for the quality of education due to appointment of own political cadres for teachers and staff. Political leaders are very much interested to capture the management committee to fulfill their hidden interest. If the community wants school's performance, political interference should be stopped and all staff and teachers should be appointed on their capacities. The highest quality teachers, who are the most capable of helping their students learn, and have deep mastery of both their subject matter and pedagogy. UNICEF also emphasized that the CFS trainings for

the teachers are not sufficient and the teachers cannot gain enough skills to implement the child-centered techniques (The Asian Development Bank, 2012).

School's Physical Condition

The school's physical condition is the most important and fundamental aspect of a child-friendly environment. Physical infrastructure is as the investment of educational process. Physical infrastructure includes location and school site, incorporates school land, playground, compound, school building, drinking water, classrooms, laboratories, library, canteen, hostel, furniture, toilet, educational aids, electric equipment, computers, etc. These aspects should be managed and made available for the consideration of children as per their right, their interest, or level.

Location and School Site

The proper school site is the main and first important factors for the launching the school health program and to make it in the interest of children as well as child-friendly schools. The area of the school is the directly associated with teaching learning activities. The school site should be healthy and out of risk factors. It should not be located near the busy road, supermarket, film hall, near the airport, jungle, canal, drainage system, public parks, or industry. The congested or noisy environment directly or indirectly affects the health status of school family and their behavior. The researcher asked and observed the selected schools and concluded the location and school sites. The researcher divided location and school sites into 10 sub-titles as (Anderson, 1972) claimed and asked the headmasters and observed and checked the facilities.

Table 2
Responses on Location and School Site

Particulars	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Peace place	3 (27.3%)	7 (63.6%)	1 (9.1%)
Pleasing Surrounding	5 (45.5%)	5 (45.5%)	1 (9.1%)
Open and enough space	3 (27.3%)	4 (36.4%)	4 (36.4%)
Little raised and dry	11 (100%)	×	×
Risk of flood and landslide	11 (100%)	×	×
Far to jungle and drainage	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	×
No effect of industry.	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)	×
Sufficient space	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)	×
Accessibility of vehicles	1 (9.1%)	6 (54.5%)	4 (36.4%)
Adequate Water	6 (54.5%)	3 (27.3%)	2 (18.2%)
Other	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)	×

Note: The figure inside the brackets indicates the response in percentage.

It was found that nearly two-third of the schools (63.6%) had satisfactory, and more than one quarter (27.30%) had good peace and quiet place. Nearly half of the schools (45.5%) had both good and satisfactory surroundings. More than one quarter schools (27.3%) had good, more than one third schools (36.4%) had satisfactory, and the same (36.4%) had poor on the issue of open and enough space. It was found that all schools had little raised and dry land and not to risk of sinking. Nearly half of the schools (45.5%) had no any risk of flood and landslide or they were in good in terms of flood and landslide. No any schools had any risk of flood and landslide. Nearly two-third of the schools (63.6%) had the good situation far from jungle and drainage. No schools had the poor condition of it. Nearly two-third of the schools (63.6%) had good condition without

any effect of industry bus park, rail station and airport. Similarly, more than half of the schools (54.5%) had the satisfactory situation having sufficient space for expansion. Only one school had good situation in the issue of sufficient space for expansion. More than half of the schools (54.5%) had the good situation having accessibility of community transportation. More than half of the schools (54.5%) had the satisfactory situation on adequate water and facility of waste disposal. The rest of the schools (45.5%) had good situation of it. Generally, the location and school sites were satisfactory.

School Building

The school building means a building designed primarily for conducting educational instruction for the students. It includes classrooms, libraries, administrative offices, halls, canteen, restrooms stadiums, fitness center, and all other structures associated with students and their learning.

Table 3
Replies on the School Building

Particulars	Yes	No
Are rooms appropriate?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Are Chalkboard in good condition?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Are seats of proper size?	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)
Do children appear to be at ease?	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)
Are windows appropriate for the light?	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)
Are there appropriate ventilation?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Is the air in the classroom fresh?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Are the facilities made as disable?	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.8%)
Do SMC and PTA actively participate?	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)
Is child club established?	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)

Table 3 shows that more than two-third schools (72.7%) had good white boards. All schools replaced blackboards with whiteboards. More than half (54.6%) schools had good furniture and students are appeared to be at ease and relaxed. Nearly half schools (45.5%) had the carpet and cushion in nursery and KG classes. Children could sleep inside their classrooms and could write on the board. Two schools had the policy to make ease and comfortable seats to the nursery and KG students. It was found that more than half schools had good windows for the light. The researcher observed and found that two-third of the schools (72.7%) had big rooms on the ratio of students. Rooms were built for the capacity of fifty students which was most essential in the past when there were no boarding schools. But now-a-days private schools were established near the public schools and made any type of policies to take good students to their schools from the community schools. Only few students were there in community schools.

Similarly, few classes had not sufficient light because of poor windows and due to private tall buildings were made nearby. For this reasons, sometimes they needed to turn on the light. On the other hand, the ventilation system was also poor and the fresh air could not be found. It is found that one-third of the schools' buildings had two types of structures. Some rooms were temporary style and the roof were made with tin, and some were RCC or permanent. The height of the rooms were satisfactory but under the tin. In summer season, the rooms were found to be so hot. Only two schools had made ram classrooms on the consideration of disable students, but a few respondents said that it is impossible to come to their schools because they belong to the hilly region. Nearly half of

the schools had good SMC and PTA and actively participated in developing schools' facilities.

School Sanitation

Sanitary facilities are such requirement of school that help make teaching learning activities more effective. If the sanitary facilities of any school are bad, no one expects that other services are good. In fact, the sanitary condition plays a vital role to attract students, teachers, and school staff. The information was collected from different environmental sanitation field such as cleanliness of surrounding, drinking water, waste disposal practices, and toilet management. Waste is identified as waste paper from classrooms, single-use paper to wells, use of drinking cups, bottles, plastic use from noodles and chocolates, tin cans, etc. The proper disposal of waste materials is essential for the protection and promotion of environment health. So, every school needs basic knowledge and practices about the proper way of waste disposal. It helps to create the sound environment of school compound and reflect the version of sanitation among the school family and community. Respondents were asked about how frequently they cleaned classroom.

Table 4

Responses on the Ways of Managing Solid Waste and Drainages

Ways of Managing Solid Waste and Drainages	Number	Percent
Collection waste materials in dustbin	9	81.9
Composting	4	36.4
Sell the non-decay to kabaddi	11	100
Send to Vehicle of municipality	3	27.3
Burning	7	63.6
Drainage system is in the school	4	36.4
Drainage passes to street.	7	63.4

Most of the schools (81.9%) had collected their wastes in dustbin but other two schools had thrown in the dig directly. All schools sold non-decay materials to kabaddi. More than one-third of the schools (36.4%) had made composting and used in their garden. Similarly, in winter season, some non-decay materials and some papers were burned by the seven schools. More than one-third of the schools had their own drainage system, but other schools did not have their drainage system and the water went to the street. Human excreta are a source of infection and disease transmission and the cause of environmental pollution. Every school has responsibility to manage it in a systematic way. Anderson (1972) prescribed one latrine for 100 pupils as minimum requirement.

Health, Security and Protection

Children's health has a direct impact on their learning and participation in activities conducted in the school. Every child has the right to live with free of diseases and, if he or she becomes ill, he or she should receive quick treatment. Along with parents, it is the duty of child-friendly schools to ensure this right so that schools must have provisions for health check-up of children, teachers, and staff at least twice a year in a systematic way. Health, security, and protection are the pride of school. Schools should be made on the prospective of health, security, and protection.

Table 5
Responses on Health, Security and Protection

Particulars	Yes	No
Does the school have compounding?	9 (81.8%)	2 (18.2%)
Is it permanent?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Is equipment inspected regularly?	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)
Do all children participate in activities?	6 (54.5%)	5 (45.5%)
Are the floor clean and good repair?	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)
Is lunchroom hygienic?	3 (27.3%)	8 (72.7%)
Are regular safety inspection made?	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)
Are unsafe practices eliminated or modified?	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)
Is there organized first aid service?	4 (36.4%)	7 (63.6%)

Note: The figure inside the brackets indicates the response in percentage.

Table 5 demonstrates that most of the schools (81.8%) had their own compound. Stone walls and brick wall were called permanent but net was said temporary. Nearly two-third of the schools (63.6%) inspected equipment regularly. More than half schools (54.5%) claimed that their all students took part in co-curricular activities. Rest of the schools said that it was impossible to involve all students in extra and co-curricular activities. Nearly half of the schools (45.5%) claimed that their floor was good and the researcher believed after observing the situation. Three schools claimed that they had extra rooms, which were used as kitchen and lunchrooms. More than two-third schools (72.7%) eliminated or modified unsafe practices. In basic schools there may be more chance of accidents due to their childhood activities, so there should be first aid service to the students but only four schools had it.

School Plans

All basic schools run at ten to four, so sun light is appropriate for teaching learning activities. But sometime the schools wanted to show projector, lap top, computer and so on at that additional light and power is needed. Six schools had the facilities of electricity, one had solar system, and the other had battery system which was installed by the school when the light was in load-shedding. More than one-quarter schools had no any extra light. Every organization have plans to arrange extra facilities and program to make the organization more active, progressive and as per the needs of the organization. The researcher tried to find out the plans in the fiscal year 2019 and 2020 BS.

Table 6
School Plans on Different Aspects

Particulars	Yes	No
Is there any plan to make compounding permanent?	2 (66.6%)	1 (33.3%)
Is there any plan to manage safe drinking water?	1(25%)	3 (75%)
Is there any plan to manage teaching materials?	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)
Does the school have plan towards dustbins, dust pan, broom?	4 (100%)	X
Does the school have plan to manage soap and water near the wash bin?	5 (45.5%)	6 (54.5%)

Table 6 demonstrates that two schools had the policy of making permanent compounding. Almost all schools had the plans towards having dustbins and dust pans brushes which felt less of those facilities. Seven schools had the plan to manage teaching

materials. Four schools wanted to buy teaching materials and two schools had the plan of managing from the donors in the fiscal year of 2076 and 2077 BS. Likewise, only one school had a plan to manage safe and pure drinking water in the fiscal year 2076 and 2077 BS. Nearly half of the schools (45.5%) had the plan of providing adequate soap and water nearby the washing bins.

Observation of School Facilities

The school is the primary and most essential socializing place for every individual. Students usually spend six to seven hours per day, so the school should be facilitated with well-furnished classrooms, proper light, ventilation, playgrounds, rest rooms, library with necessary books and magazines, safe and clean laboratory, and so on.

Table 7
Facilities of the Schools

Particulars	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Play ground	1	7	3
Classrooms	3	7	1
Light	5	5	1
Ventilation	3	7	1
Water supply	2	4	5
Sanitation	×	9	2
Canteen	1	3	7
Toilet rooms	×	5	6
Safety Measures	×	11	×
First Aid	×	3	8

Table 7 reveals that schools claimed that they had their own playground. From the observation, the researcher found that nearly two-third of the schools (63.6%) had satisfactory, and one had good and three had poor play ground. Only one school had a good playground with some courts for volleyball and kabaddi games. More than one-quarter ((27.3%) schools had not good playgrounds. They claimed that they engaged their students in other activities like quiz, debate, painting, etc. Children could not actively participate in recreational and physical activities. Playgrounds were insufficient and needed to improve to make more practice in games and sports. Classrooms in community schools had larger and seems unrealistic to the student-ratio. Students were degreasing day to day in most of the community schools but the classrooms were as in the past. Only one school had poor light, ventilation, and classrooms. According to Anderson (1972), for an alert and stimulating class, the room must have proper temperature, humidity, and movement of air. When the elimination of heat and moisture are retarded, students experience drowsiness, lassitude, depression, headache, and loss of vigor. Temperature in the classroom should be held between 66°F to 71°F. In the winter 66°F and in the summer 71°F students will feel comfortable. Proper light is also necessary for easily read and write. Light and ventilation directly affect on the student's health.

Nearly fifty percent schools had poor drinking water. According to Kerry, Larry and Charles (1988), sanitary drinking fountains should be strategically placed throughout the school building. These fountains should be easily accessible to persons in wheelchairs and should be placed in such a way as to minimize safety hazards. It is better if drinking fountains are placed in wall recesses rather than projecting into hallways as the fountains should be of the (Jet) type as opposed to (bubblers). Further, the drinking fountains should be designed for easy cleaning; this cleaning should be occurring several times

daily. Sanitation, toilet rooms, safety measure, and first aid were not good in selected schools due to no proper waste disposal like decay and non-decay, no water, dustbin, and latches inside the toilet. Similarly, safety measure was not good in the sense that there was the store of broken benches and table in the last corner. Broken light and its circuit were not managed properly in two schools. First aid was not good because there were not specialized and trained staff.

CONCLUSION

From the above findings and discussion, it is concluded that majority of schools were trying to make their schools more child-friendly in slow motion due to the knowledge obtained by the teachers, parents, and management as well as available resources like money, manpower, and materials. Physical facilities should be managed and made available for students with the consideration of children their right, their interest, and level. A good physical condition plays an important role in imparting quality education. Infrastructures need to be attractive, safe, durable, and friendly to children, disabled, boys, and girls. From the observation, facilities were not in favor of child-friendly school environment. Traditionally, strict rules and regulations had practice to learn and emphasis was given to parrot learning as their teachers make the students to follow. On the other hand, child right activists as well as the child-friendly school framework advocate for their right and their free and fearless environment, which should be created in schools to obtain quality education. It is very much essential to create a child-friendly school environment.

Recommendations

It is recommended that plans of managing physical facilities should be made after the interaction with concerned people like the School Management Committee (SMC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the representation of students, teacher and guardians. Communication, cooperation, and coordination between communities and schools are needed to enhance quality education. Sanitation inside the restrooms and managing of dustbins inside the restrooms is essential so all the stakeholders need to think and manage immediately.

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