ORIGINAL ARTICLE

LEVEL OF COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA

Jalal Deen Careemdeen *[1]

[1] The Faculty of Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka. Email: jdcar@ou.ac.lk

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The community environment wherein the school is situated is influenced by its members, leaders, and the availability of resources (social, human, and financial). The community environment plays a significant role in supporting the success of educational programmes and supporting the attainment of school goals. Such support can be understood as maintaining school safety, carrying out community learning hours and supporting various school programmes directly in contact with the community. This research was aimed at determining community environmental support for student learning, mainly taking into account gender differences as a factor among secondary school children in Sri Lanka. The study used a survey research design and a questionnaire instrument for data collection. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 1350 secondary school students. To analyse the data, the research used descriptive analyses such as mean, standard deviation and MANOVA analysis. The results demonstrate that the community environmental support for student learning is was at a moderate level (overall mean of 3.522, overall S.D. of 0.931). MANOVA analysis shows significant differences in community environmental support based on gender as community support for female student learning is significantly higher than male students. The implications of the study indicate that community organisations can still increase their academic support in their city or village. Local community organisations can organise educational seminars and workshops, be involved in improving the school's physical environment and infrastructure, sponsor events, provide financial assistance for specifically male students as well as female students.

Key Words: Community Environmental Support, student learning, Gender

Introduction

The community is a microsystem in which much socialization and development take place (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)[1]. It also represents an extension of family and friendship ties, commonly described as a "sense of community". A community is a group of people having something in common. A community is created because no individuals are self-sufficient; we all have many needs, so we turn to others to help satisfy those requirements to survive. People living in the same geographical location area (neighbourhood, town, city) following the same laws are identified as a community. It also sets people with a friendly association, fellowship, mutual sharing, and general interests. Community ecology comprises the practical and psychological relationship between those people and their physical and social environment. Therefore, the crucial components of a community are people's relationship with one another and the sense of belongingness and obligation to the group (Berns, 2004)[2]. The community has an important role in upgrading education quality in primary and secondary schools, and such participation makes a difference in (M. Alam, 2015)[3]. Community factors such as the educational status of the community, the financial position of the community, communication, environment, and societal unity and cooperation all have an impact on learner achievement and wellbeing.

Literature Review

The community environment plays a more significant role in supporting the succession of educational programmes. Supporting the attainment of school goals can be understood as maintaining safety in school, carrying out community learning hours, and supporting various school programmes directly in contact with the community. (Maunah, 2019)[4]. Community plays its role in financing schools, providing resources, overseeing school education, providing educational places such as zoos, art stages, libraries, museum buildings and so on, and community is a laboratory and source for learning. (Hasbulloh, 2011)[5].

M. S. Alam (2015)[3] carried out a case study to identify rural parents' perceptions of the community factors that affect learner achievement in Bangladesh. He found six community factors that influence learners' achievement, such as schools, educational status, financial position, communication, environment, unity, and cooperation. Alam showed that community support for education is very poor due to the community's poverty. He shows, in line with parental perceptions that many children are not involved in education due to uneducated neighbourhood and naughty peers. Alam presented several suggestions based on parental perceptions. "Parent-teacher Association" and "School Management Committee" should extend their cooperation with schools as it would be helpful for schools' management to enhance students' wellbeing, there should be greater communication between the community and school and the community's population should extend their support in providing financial assistance for tuition fees, school dresses, note-books, pencils and books for disadvantaged families' children.

The school's pro-social organization is a more important factor in students' well-being (Ratnik & Rüütel, 2017)[6]. Community organizations contributed to upgrading school facilities, improving school staffing and leadership, organizing learning programmes for students, providing new resources, improving curriculum and teaching and finding funds for school programmes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)[7]. A business can donate equipment, provide expert guest speakers, host field trips, and/or offer apprenticeship training to students. Such support provides linkages

that enable children to understand the connection between school learning and the world of work and discover new role models to emulate.

Religious institutions support indirectly influences children's educational achievement through significant and positive influences on students' school behaviours and educational self-concepts (Sanders, 1998)[8]. The church encourages pro-education values (e.g. discipline, hard work, patience) among students to enhance students' involvement in learning and academic success. It provides them with an outlet to share their day to day challenges associated with the education (Donahoo & Caffey, 2010)[9]. These students also report relying on God in adverse times (Dumangane Jr, 2017)[10], giving them the strength to address challenges (Holland, 2016)[11]. They firmly believe that religion's moral values have helped them distance themselves from crimes, drugs, and gangs. The educational activities and networking opportunities were important forms of social capital that students gain from their church (Byfield, 2008)[12].

Besides, neighbourhood factors influence childrens' behavioural changes. Oliver et al. (2007)[13] showed that neighbourhood factors appear to be independently associated with kindergarten children's readiness to learn upon entry into kindergarten over and above individual factors. Furthermore, they demonstrated that neighbourhood factors are more strongly associated with the language, communication, and cognitive aspects of children's readiness to learn than social and emotional aspects. However, Novak et al. (2018)[14] showed that academic achievement correlated with family social capital, but there was a weak relationship between neighbourhood and academic achievement. The influence of residential/neighbourhood communities on ethnic and religious communities significantly predicts students' secondary education achievement.

Furthermore, to illustrate the community's potential for learning, Philadelphia's city experimented with a "school without walls" (Bremer & Von Moschzisker, 1971)[15]. Students in grades 9-12 were chosen by lottery from eight school districts; neither economic nor academic background was a factor. Instead of school buildings, each of the eight areas had a headquarters with office space for staff and lockers for students. All teaching and instruction were held within the community. Thus, while biology was studied at the zoo, and art was studied at the art museum, vocational education was held at several business areas, and so on. A higher-than-average percentage of students who took part in the program went to college (Bremer et al. 1971)[15].

Community environmental support concerning student learning has been widely examined, but very little attention has been given to student learning in the Sri Lankan context related to community environmental support. The current study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

Aim of the Study

This study attempted to identify the level of community environmental support for student learning and differences of community environmental support based on gender among secondary school children in Sri Lanka.

Objectives

The present study aims to:
   01. Investigate the levels of community environmental support for learning among secondary
        school children in Sri Lanka.
   02. Identify the differences in community environments based on student gender.

Methodology

This survey used a quantitative research design. The population of the study consists of secondary schoolchildren in Sri Lanka. A total of 1350 secondary schoolchildren were selected for the study using a stratified random sampling technique to select the study sample. The questionnaire tool was developed in line with the needs of the survey. It included two sections as one section to identify student's demographic backgrounds and the next section to measure students perception of community environmental support. The respondents were given five choices for community environmental support construct based on the Likert Scale (1–5): Never (1), Rarely (2), Occasionally (3), Often (4) and Always (5). The opinions of experts from the sociology of education were used to establish the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The internal consistency of the instrument was based on the report of Cronbach's alpha coefficient values (0.971). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analysing the data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23 was used for the data analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to obtain the mean and standard deviations, to determine the overall level of community environmental support for student learning. MANOVA analysis is used to determine any significant differences in virtual environmental support based on gender amongst Sri Lankan secondary school children.

Results

The values such as mean and standard deviation, obtained from the descriptive analysis, are used to determine the level of environmental support from various community ecological support categories. Seven items were constructed that would be rated by the respondents using a 5-level scale (Never, Rarely, Occasionally, Often, Always) on the aspect of community support, as shown in Table 01.

Table 01
Level of Socio-Environmental Support in terms of Community Support

No.	Item	Mean	S. D	Interpretation
	The local community (OBA, SDC….) ……………….…			
B.1	organize many educational seminars and workshops at our school	3.260	1.306	Moderately High
B.2	participates in improving school physical infrastructure (buildings, science laboratories, repairing broken material, and school compound) which are helpful for our learning	3.703	1.232	Moderately High

B.3	provides us financial assistance (Sponsor) for events like sports meets, Religious day, Sinhala Day, Tamil Day, English day etc.	3.660	1.249	Moderately High
B.4	My neighbors/ relatives praise me when I've done something well in my education which encourages me to involve further in learning.	3.680	1.257	Moderately High
B.5	My neighbors/ relatives provide educational materials such as books, pen, pencil, color etc. for my education.	3.342	1.362	Moderately High
B.6	My neighbors/ relatives give us educational advices which motivate me to involve in learning	3.642	1.254	Moderately High
B.7	I can count on the local community's help for education, whenever I need.	3.367	1.325	Moderately High
	Overall	**3.5222**	**0.931**	**Moderately High**

Table 01 shows the level of support various local community organizations provided for the overall mean of 3.522, overall S.D. of 0.931, with the interpretation being moderately high. The highest mean value in terms of community support (B.2) was obtained from various local community organizations to improve the school physical infrastructure with the mean of 3.703 (S.D. =1.232), with the interpretation being moderately high. The second highest mean value was obtained due to the praise of neighbours/ relatives for the students when they did well in their studies. This encouraged them to get involved in further learning (B.4), resulting in a mean of 3.680 (S.D. =1.257) with the interpretation of this item also being moderately high. The lowest item in this category is the one about educational seminars and workshops for students organized by various local community organizations at the schools (B.1). For this item, the mean is 3.260 (S.D. = 1.306), and the interpretation is moderately high. The results show that students have a moderately high level of educational support from various local community organizations to encourage their involvement in learning.

Table 02 shows the MANOVA analysis for the difference in mean scores obtained for community environmental support based on gender.

Table 02
MANOVA Difference Aspects of Socio-Environmental Support based on Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	S. D	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Total Square	F	Sig.
Community Support	Male	675	3.395	0.926	21.660	1	21.660	25.389	0.000
	Female	675	3.648	0.920					

Table 02 shows there are significant gender-wise differences in the community support for student learning [F = 25.389 and sig = 0.000] as community support for female students (Mean = 3.648 and S.D. = 0.920) is greater than for male students (Mean = 3.395 and S.D. = 0.926).

Discussion

Community organisations contribute to upgrading school facilities, improving school staffing and leadership, organising learning activities for students, providing new resources, improving curriculum and teaching, and finding funds for schools programmes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)[16]. However, notably, M. Alam (2015)[3] found contrarily that community support for education is very poor in Bangladesh due to poverty, and suggested that the 'School Management Committee' should extend their cooperation with schools to help school management enhance student wellbeing.

Conclusion

The findings on the level of community support towards student learning are moderate-high for all seven statements. Thus, students may often, but not always, receive support from the local community. The results of the study revealed that there are significant gender-wise differences in the community support for student learning as community support for female students is greater than for male students.

The implication of the Study

This study shows that the local community educational support is moderately high, indicating that community organisations can still increase their academic support in their city or village. Local community organisations can organise educational seminars and workshops, be involved in improving the school's physical environment and infrastructure, sponsor events, provide financial assistance for students in the poverty line, and organise seminars for uneducated parents to enable them to assist in their children's learning.

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