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## **Analytical assessment on child friendly environment of a higher secondary school in Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of child-friendly schools is built on the idea of rights-based education, encouraging respect for student's rights, dignity and equality. Owing to the fact that UNICEF, UNESCO and World Education have rich experience world-wide in child friendly schools, Nepal and other developing countries needs to benefit from these experiences through assessments and upgrading approaches. This study is an effort to identify the level of child-friendly environment in a typical higher secondary school in Nepal and finding out the approaches used by the school to create child friendly environment within its premises. It also recognizes the factors that is hindering the formation of such environment in the school and recommends policy and program interventions towards making the school more child-friendly.

**Keywords:** Child-friendly environment, education, school.

### **1. Introduction**

It is stated in the World Declaration on Education for All that education provides knowledge, values, and attitudes required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their intellectual capacities, to live and work in dignity, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning <sup>[1]</sup>. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) not only insists that children have a right to basic education, but also insists what form that education should take in its design, organization, management, content, processes and learning environments <sup>[2]</sup>. The essential characteristics of an enabling learning environment are concisely summarized in the concept of the child-friendly school, providing a valuable reference point for reforming education systems from the perspective of the rights and interests of the child. Child-friendly schools not only help children to realize their right to a basic education of good quality. They also address such important issues as helping children to learn what they need in order to face the challenges of the new era, enhancing their health and well-being, guaranteeing them safe and protective places for learning, raising teacher morale and motivation, and mobilizing community support for education. There are different conceptualizations of child-friendly schools, with some organizations emphasizing the physical and mental health of children (e.g., the World Health Organization) and others giving more attention to education access, equity and quality. The concept of child-friendly schools advocated by UNICEF employs a holistic approach to child development, encompassing a wide range of different components that are mutually enhancing, complementary and inseparable <sup>[3]</sup>. These components constitute integral parts of the child development process, where in each part is equally important and cannot be successfully implemented without the others. Therefore, it is important that all CFS components- whether they focus on access, equity, quality or participation are conceptualized, planned and implemented jointly <sup>[3]</sup>. Figure 2-1 provides an overview of the basic characteristics of the CFS, which are classified as: Rights – based, Child-seeking and Inclusive, Gender – sensitive, Participatory, and Quality-based (including education quality issues related to pupils / students, teachers, processes, content and environment).

In all countries across the globe, special efforts are being made to address the issues of access to and quality of education. These efforts are founded on the Education for All, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international agreements. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has ensured the right to education of all children <sup>[3]</sup>. The CRC has also recognized that all children have the right to receive quality education without any discrimination for their overall development. The Interim Constitution of Nepal and the national documents on education lay down guidelines for ensuring this right.

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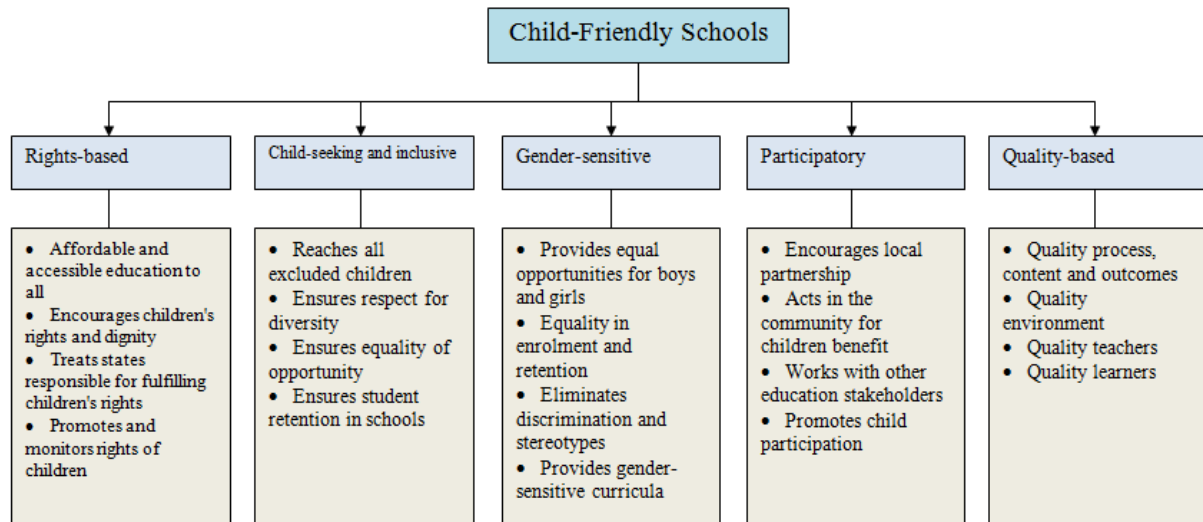


Fig 1: The Conceptual Framework of Child-Friendly Schools <sup>[3]</sup>

In order to increase access to education and ensure quality education, several efforts are being made. The concept of child-friendly school is one of them. This concept takes into consideration the aspects such as the minimum and expected indicators for schools and the roles that can be played by different stakeholders in the development of schools. It is expected that such activities will result in parents taking interest in their children's education, communities playing important roles in school development and schools upgrading the level of their quality day by day. Far from being safe, wholesome and joyful centers of learning, many schools in Nepal are places where children fear to go. Teachers are often untrained, uncaring, and quick to give corporal punishment. Schools are dirty and lack minimum sanitary facilities, especially for girls. There are no sports activities or recreational facilities. The method of instruction involves rote learning rather than encouraging children to explore, analyze and understand what they are learning. However, there are excellent child-centered learning approaches pioneered by institutions like the Bank Street College of Education and introduced in Nepal as part of Rato Bangala Foundation's outreach program. UNICEF, UNESCO, World Education and others have rich experience world-wide in child-friendly schools. Nepal needs to benefit from these experiences, and make going to school a truly joyful and stimulating experience for our students.

A test of whether a school is truly child-friendly is to ensure that it is especially girl-friendly. Worldwide experience has shown that girl-friendly schools are beneficial for boys as well, whereas the other way around is not always the case. Listening to children's views and promoting their participation are other features of child-friendly approach.

## 2. Description of the School and its facilities

Opal International Higher Secondary School is an evolved version of Unique Higher Secondary School which was established in 1996 in Siphah, Chabahil, Kathmandu. It is situated in prime location in Siphah adjacent to famous Siphah Chaur in the sacred World Heritage site of Pashupati area. The school is easily accessible from different parts of Kathmandu. The school is in calm place despite its prime location as there is wide and open Siphah Chaur in front of the school and a great greenery of famous Bhadarkhal forest. The school has 6 buildings, among which 5 of the buildings are permanent and 1 is temporary. Among 6 of the buildings,

3 of the buildings are academic blocks, one is hostel, one is canteen and one is library. In addition, there are separate buildings for Pre-primary, Primary, Lower Secondary and Secondary Sections. Likewise, the school has total of 15 classrooms; whereas there are other rooms such as Principal's room, Vice-Principal's room, Staff room, and Account office. All the classrooms are bright, airy and spacious. As of the data of 2014, the school has 375 students from Nursery to class 10, with 23 teachers including Principal and Vice Principal.

Besides providing quality education, the school equally gives importance to the health of the students as it has a sick room facility. Similarly, there are adequate numbers of dustbins in school compound, with one in each classroom. The school library consists of around 4000 books. It focuses on providing healthy drinking water to the students and the staffs as it consists of the Euro guard system to purify the water. The school has one toilet for the staffs and 2 for the pre-primary section. Also there are separate toilets for girls and boys students, consisting of 4 for each. Moreover, there is the good supply of water in the toilets. The school playground is well equipped which is designed properly for pre-primary and primary students with well managed playing materials.

## 3. Methodology for the analytical study

This study primarily supports to understand the child-friendly environment of the Opal school and its impacts on the students. The scope of this study is in addition that helps to understand the strengths, weaknesses and derive the potentialities and opportunities which help to enhance the child-friendly environment of Opal school, one of the private schools of Kathmandu which is a good representation of thousands of other schools in Kathmandu which provides Secondary Level Education.

The primary source of data includes the data collected after the interview with the teachers of the school, participatory observation and unstructured interviews to gather the primary information. The secondary source of data includes information gathered from the school brochures, prospectus, magazines and related books, journals, articles, documents, website. The child friendly environment of the school was examined on the basis of its aspects, and derived recommendations for scaling up the environment. The environment, as explained in Figure 1, comprises of

following criteria:

Children receive a safe and healthy environment, physically, mentally and emotionally.

Children's aptitude, capacity and level are respected and provision is made for necessary environment and curriculum for their learning accordingly.

Teachers bear the full responsibility for assessing the learner's achievement in terms of learning.

Children are encouraged to enroll in school without any discrimination on grounds of their caste/ethnicity, sex, financial status, physical and mental frailty, and are treated without discrimination both within and outside school.

In addition to children's education, special attention is paid to their health and security needs.

Children, parents and communities take part actively in policy making, planning, implementation and evaluation of activities in the schools.

All types of physical, corporal and mental punishment are prohibited, and constant efforts are made to protect children from abuse and harm.

#### **4. Child Friendly Environment at Opal School**

Out of the aspects considered for creating a child friendly environment, following are studied and explained briefly.

#### **5. Gender Perspective of the School in Education**

In the current educational context of Nepal, ample efforts are being made at governmental and non-governmental level to achieve gender equality. Such efforts have resulted in the enrolment percentage of girls, retention of those already enrolled in schools to some extent and making arrangements for alternative education for school dropouts. However, gender perspective in education is yet to be strengthened.

Opal school was found to be Gender Sensitive. The number of girl students attending the school is impressive. Also the class participation of girl students is strong because the teacher gives equal priority to the girl and boy students. Even in case of the school uniform, the school has been flexible enough as the girls students can choose to wear either skirt or pant as per their comfort. Besides even in the case of teacher recruitment, the school has given equal emphasis to the female teachers; as the number of female teachers was equally considered as that of the male teachers.

#### **6. Participation of Children, Families and Communities**

The main responsibility of school management lies with the SMC, Parents-Teachers' Association (PTA), principal and teachers. In addition, active and continuous participation of children, families and communities in planning and program implementation in schools has to be ensured. In the duration of school observation, the researcher perceived the active participation of the students in making the annual event – Parent's day a success. The teachers were evenly cooperative. However, shortage and improper available resources were to some extent hindering the participation of the students. For e.g.: shortage of the cassette players, improper place for the students to rehearse and so on. The family has a major role to play in the development of children's education and other aspects. Opal school conducts parent's meeting thrice a year – 1 week after result distribution for proper and all-round development of children. In addition, few of the parents are even the members of the Management Committee of the school. However, the school should also form Parent Teachers

Association (PTA) to strengthen the relation with the parents and making them active.

In Opal school, the participation of the community people in the school was not observed. However, through the interaction with the teachers, it was found that the school conducts few programs in the community for e.g.: Cleaning the community program in the Environment day.

#### **7. Health, Security and Protection**

In Opal School, as for the safe drinking water there is a Euro guard system. But the system is not properly maintained. Also, the toilets do not seem to be hygienic enough. Hence, the school should put upon more focus in improving the healthy environment. To develop as a child friendly school, Opal school also needs to take special precautions to protect students from potential accidents as the school is located just in the side of the road. However, the school has erected walls or fences around the school; has the provision for first aid. Furthermore, Nepal being prone to earthquake, along with adopting measures for safety from earthquakes and other natural disasters, provision must be made for disseminating information and organizing simulation exercises about them from time to time.

#### **8. Physical Condition of School**

School's physical infrastructure encompasses school land and compound, school building, classrooms, laboratories, library, furniture (pigeonhole, tables, cupboards, and desks/benches), toilet, drinking water, playground, educational aids, black/white boards, audio video materials, cupboards, electric equipment, computers, canteen, hostel and protection room etc. The physical aspect of school crosscuts other aspects of a child-friendly educational environment. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the management of the physical aspects among other diverse aspects of child-friendly school.

Looked at from the perspective of child-friendly environment, the physical infrastructures in Opal schools is not found to be child-friendly to the desired level with an adverse effect on imparting of quality education. Only few of the classrooms are spacious with good-lightening system. However, the other classrooms seem to be congested which hinders the teaching-learning activities in many ways. In case of laboratories, all of the laboratories are bit congested whereas due to the lack of space, the chemistry lab do not seem to be safe as such the school should give a special focus on adjusting this situation. Nevertheless, the library is managed with adequate number of books, record of each book and record of the students who borrow the books.

As far as other physical aspects are concerned, the layout, design, construction etc. are not found to be done by keeping the interest of children in mind. It is imperative to change this state of affairs and make them attractive, safe and child-friendly. This is the only way to guarantee quality education in the desirable child-friendly environment.

#### **9. Teaching and Learning Process**

During the class observation, the classroom decoration with the educational materials was impressive. However, perceiving the capacity of both students and teachers, more of creativeness can be added to it and it can be managed more properly. Besides, it was also seen that the teachers do not limit the teaching methods to Lecture method, but they also use Demonstration method, Collaboration Method and

Learning by Teaching method; hence making the teaching and learning process effective. In order to make teaching and learning activities exploratory, interactive and promotional, emphasis should be placed on aspects such as project work, case studies, observations, and so on.

### 10. Need of Child Friendly Schools in Nepal

Most of the schools in Nepal are still being run in a conventional way in terms of management and teaching-learning. The whole school environment is focused on encouraging children to get the text by heart. The text books and teaching aids made available by the central level only are being used. Seldom are the teaching and learning materials that can be made available at the local level utilized. For all these reasons, teaching and learning that are suitable to children has not been addressed properly. In the child-friendly schools, these issues are addressed. If the child-friendly environment exists in the schools, children can learn quickly and they will have less mental stress while reading and writing. Keeping in mind such positive aspects, schools are required to be child-friendly.

Moreover, the current period of major political, economic and social transition has created conditions of discontinuity, uncertainty and instability that affect educational opportunities for children. The profoundly negative impacts of the transition period on education are attributable to such factors as the economic crises, displacement of communities, disintegration of social structures, scarce physical and financial resources, deterioration of educational facilities, and a lack of qualified teachers. As a result of these conditions, children often have limited access to quality basic education. Access to quality, child-friendly schools can play an important role in creating continuity during the transition period. In the short term, it provides an opportunity for children to acquire knowledge, competencies and skills that enable them to cope with a rapidly changing environment in more effective ways. In the longer term, it builds the necessary foundation for the personal development and well-being of children by enabling them to understand their situation, communicate effectively, make informed decisions and take action.

The child-friendly school effort started in Nepal in 2002 in 45 government-run schools in two districts; Sunsari and Kavre. The initiative has now reached more than 1,100 schools across 24 districts of the country <sup>[4]</sup>. UNICEF provides training on child-friendly teaching and learning to the teachers in the pilot schools in close partnership with the Department of Education and also provides the materials necessary to facilitate child-friendly teaching and learning methods. The training provides conceptual clarity to the teachers and orients them on the intricacies of dealing with young boys and girls as individuals.

### 11. Conclusion

This work has been presented as a case study of one of the typical higher secondary schools in Kathmandu. The motive behind this was to examine and recommend child-friendly environment in schools of developing countries. It was seen, in the case of Opal higher secondary school, that the number of girls and boys attending the school is impressive, the meeting of teachers and parents is taking place in a planned way, the teaching methods and materials used was effective with extracurricular activities for all round development of students and provision of excursion, hiking, educational tour

once a year from class 1-10. However, the school should also focus more on conducting training for teachers as to enhance the provision of quality of education. It has to make provisions for conducting immunization programs against different diseases to protect children with the cooperation of the health posts in the community as well as health workers. It must have provisions for health check-up of children at least twice a year, and the personal health profile of every pupil must be maintained in a systematic and updated manner. The school should form Parent Teachers Association (PTA) to strengthen the relation with the parents and held meetings once every two months. As to enhance child participation, the school should form a child club and activities carried out by the club monitored and reviewed. Also capacity building programs should be conducted by SMC for child club members.

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