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Authoritarian School: A Nurturing Place for Autocracy

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Abstract

A school is said to be a transitional place for inculcating basic values of human living across generations besides a place for learning academic disciplines. Children enter the school with a diversity of attitudes and behaviour patterns that are the outcome of environment of their family. School is a place where attitudes and behaviour patterns of tender minds are shaped according to the needs of society. School teacher is the agent of the society in relation to other role performers in education to pursue this task. For that he and other role performers should be in the possession of desirable values. Numerous reports and studies have highlighted the authoritarian attitude of school teachers and other role performers in school education system. This paper is based on a preliminary study to investigate the prevalence of undesirable attitudes and behaviour patterns among various role performers in school educational system with particular reference to school teachers in an Indian state of Punjab. A comparative prevalence of undesirable behaviour among male and female teachers is also depicted in the paper. Reasons for prevalence of undesirable behaviour also form the part of the paper.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Education exists in human society as a system of social relationships among various status-role holders. Social relationship is a human action in a context that is socially defined. In a situation that is socially defined, various status-role holders are expected to act as per socially set norms or standards. The socially set norms for various status-role holders in social institution are termed as status-role definitions. The status-role definitions for vari-

ous status-role holders in a social institution are governed by other social institutions in the society in different contexts. The basis for various status-role definitions in social institutions is the values that are a part of the culture of plurality of individuals or groups. Anything that is considered to be desirable or to have some worth of its own is a value. Some of the values may form the basic principle of human living and social interaction, such as truth, justice, equality, humanism, tolerance, peace, etc. Some others are qualities that are considered desirable such as excellence, commitment, studiousness, honesty, empathy, etc. Despite socially defined context for interaction provided by social institutions, not all the individuals in a group accept the social status-role definitions or act as per role expectations. Such deviance from the social role expectations is generally controlled with sanctions of various types. Deviance on a large scale may lead to modifications in the structure of status-role definitions or change in social institutions. Social institutions may undergo changes in order to meet the demands of the different social situations in terms of time and space [1]. Sometimes the change may also influence the value system, such as, mundane values like social position, power, wealth, material possessions, etc. take preference over the basic and desirable values. This change in the value system may also influence the status-role definitions of various status-role holders in the social institutions like education.

Durkheim was of the opinion that excessive individualism in education can lead to personal defeat and social chaos. For him, education is above all a social means to a social end—the means by which a society guarantees its own survival. The teacher is society's agent, the critical link in cultural transmission. It is his task to create a social and a moral being. Through him, society creates man in its image. "That," says Durkheim, "is the task and glory of education". It is not merely a matter of allowing an individual to develop in accordance with his nature, disclosing whatever hidden capacities lie there only waiting to be revealed. Education creates a new being. For Durkheim, school had a crucial and clearly specified function: to create a new being, shaped according to the needs of the society. While this might seem restrictive and repressive to child-centered educators, Durkheim argues that the very reverse is true. Only by imposing limits can the child be liberated from the inevitable frustrations of incessant striving. Only as the child is systematically exposed to his country's cultural heritage can he achieve a sense of identity and personal fulfillment. Only as he is conscious of his implication in a society to which he is bound by duty and desire can he become a moral being. Durkheim eliminates the church because a sound morality must be founded in reason, not revelation. The family is out since the indulgent warmth of kinship ties is incompatible with the sterner demands of morality. If the family, small and intimate as it has become, can provide emotional support and tension release, it is not setting for cultivating the abstract idea of duty. On the other hand, moral education cannot be deferred until adulthood, nor it can be entrusted to adult agencies whose demands are excessive for a young child. So the task of moral education devolves upon the school [2].

It is obvious from this discussion that education is a virtuous institution for the survival of society. The teacher is the representative of society for the production of worthy social beings. The conduct of the teacher is based on the value system laid down by the plurality of the individuals or groups. Some values are basic for all the individuals in the society and some others are desirable from different status-role holders. School is the context for the transmission of value system. The conduct for a teacher may have cultural variations; nevertheless a common minimum is the same for all. National Education Association of the United States have laid down a code of ethics and all members of the profession have a moral duty to abide by the code of ethics which is based on the following five principles.

2. A Code of Ethics for American School Teachers

First Principle: *The primary obligation of the teaching profession is to guide children, youth, and adults in the pursuit of knowledge and skills, to prepare them in the ways of democracy, and to help them to become happy, useful, self-supporting citizens. The ultimate strength of the nation lies in the social responsibility, economic competence, and moral strength of the individual American.*

In fulfilling the obligations of this first principle the teacher will:

1) Deal justly and impartially with students regardless of their physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, social, racial, or religious characteristics;

2) Recognize the differences among students and seek to meet their individual needs;

3) Encourage students to formulate and work for high individual goals in the development of their physical, intellectual, creative, and spiritual endowments;

4) Aid students to develop an understanding and appreciation not only of the opportunities and benefits of

American democracy but of their obligations to it;

5) Respect the right of every student to have confidential information about himself withheld except when its release is to authorized agencies or is required by law;

6) Accept no remuneration for tutoring except in accordance with approved policies of the governing board.

Second Principle: *The members of the teaching profession share with parents the task of shaping each student's purposes and acts toward socially acceptable ends. The effectiveness of many methods of teaching is dependent upon cooperative relationships with the home.*

In fulfilling the obligations of this second principle the teacher will:

1) Respect the basic responsibility of parents for their children;

2) Seek to establish friendly and cooperative relationships with the home;

3) Help to increase the student's confidence in his own home and avoid disparaging remarks which might undermine that confidence;

4) Provide parents with information that will serve the best interests of their children, and be discreet with information received from parents;

5) Keep parents informed about the progress of their children as interpreted in terms of the purposes of school.

Third Principle: *The teaching profession occupies a position of public trust involving not only the individual teacher's personal conduct, but also the interaction of the school and the community. Education is most effective when these many relationships operate in a friendly, cooperative, and constructive manner.*

In fulfilling the obligations of this third principle the teacher will:

1) Adhere to any reasonable pattern of behavior accepted by the community for professional persons;

2) Perform the duties of citizenship, and participate in community activities with due consideration for his obligations to his students, his family and himself;

3) Discuss controversial issues from an objective point of view, thereby keeping his class free from partisan opinions;

4) Recognize that the public schools belong to the people of community, encourage lay participation in shaping the purposes of the school, and strive to keep the public informed of the educational program which is being provided;

5) Respect the community in which he is employed and be loyal to school system, community, state, and nation;

6) Work to improve education in the community and to strengthen the community's moral, spiritual, and intellectual life.

Fourth Principle: *The members of the teaching profession have inescapable obligations with respect to employment. These obligations are nearly always shared employer-employee responsibilities based upon mutual respect and good faith.*

In fulfilling the obligations of this Fourth principle the teacher will:

1) Conduct professional business thru the proper channels;

2) Refrain from discussing confidential and official information with unauthorized persons;

3) Apply for employment on the basis of competence only, and avoid asking for a specific position known to be filled by another teacher;

4) Seek employment in a professional manner, avoiding such practices as the indiscriminate distribution of applications;

5) Refuse to accept a position when the vacancy has been created through unprofessional activity or pending controversy over professional policy or the application of unjust personnel practices and procedures;

6) Adhere to the conditions of a contract until service there under has been performed, the contract has been terminated by mutual consent, or the contract has otherwise been legally terminated;

7) Give and expect due notice before a change of position is to be made;

8) Be fair in all recommendations that are given concerning the work of other teachers;

9) Accept no compensation from producers of instructional supplies when one's recommendations affect the local purchase or use of such teaching aids;

10) Engage in no gainful employment, outside of his contract, where the employment affects adversely his professional status or impairs his standing with students, associates, and the community;

11) Cooperate in the development of school policies and assume one's professional obligations thereby in-

curred;

12) Accept one's obligation to the employing board for maintaining a professional level of service.

Fifth Principle: *The teaching profession is distinguished from many other occupations by the uniqueness and quality of the professional relationships among all teachers. Community support and respect are influenced by the standards of teachers and their attitudes towards teaching and other teachers.*

In fulfilling the obligations of this fifth principle the teacher will:

1) Deal with other members of the profession in the same manner as he himself wishes to be treated;

2) Stand by other teachers who have acted on his behalf and at his request;

3) Speak constructively of other teachers, but report honestly to responsible persons in matters involving welfare of students, the school system, and the profession;

4) Maintain active membership in professional organizations and, thru participation, strive to attain the objectives that justify such organized groups;

5) Seek to make professional growth continuous by such procedures as study, research, travel, conferences, and attendance at professional meetings;

6) Make the teaching profession so attractive in ideals and practices that sincere and young people will want to enter it [3].

3. A Code of Professional Ethics for Indian School Teachers

The draft of the Code of Professional Ethics for Indian school teachers, developed earlier in 1988, was reviewed in a national workshop held in NCERT, with a view to evolving a fresh Code of Professional Ethics for Teachers in the light of changing role of teachers. Five major areas of professional activities which encompass the work of a teacher were selected [4].

1) Teacher in relation to pupils.

2) Teacher in relation to parents/guardians.

3) Teacher in relation to society and the nature.

4) Teacher in relation to profession, colleagues and professional organization.

5) Teacher in relation to management/administration.

The basis of the principles laid down for American and Indian school teachers are the same. The core of the guidelines for teachers is based on the relationships between various actors in education. If actors involved act as per value based rules laid for their actions then the outcome of the education in the larger society is well served. The first most significant relationship in education is that of teacher with the student. If the teacher is in the possession of the basic values of human living and the knowledge of various disciplines, and is committed to transfer them to the student in the formal setting. On the other side the student is anxious to accept the knowledge and the basic values of human living, then that relationship is said to be fruitful. The other actors in the education are parents or guardians, who have to provide the support system to the student for acquisition of values and knowledge. They have to interact with the teacher and other actors in education to facilitate the teaching-learning process. They are also the beneficiaries of the outcome of the teacher-student relationship besides the student.

Community or the larger society is both, the beneficiaries and the investors, of education through its individual and societal functions. Social change, division of labour, social stratification, social cohesion etc. is some benefits of education for society. Qualitative and quantitative improvement in education is some investments of society in education. Teacher in the possession of professional values is also contributing to education. If he has cordial and supportive role towards the colleagues them he is contributing to education and the formal institution of education. By becoming the member of a professional organisation, he is serving the profession as well as protecting his own interests. Another relationship in education is that of the teacher with the administrator or management. Administration or management provides the formal setting and guidelines for the teaching learning activity. It monitors the actors and coordinates between the actors in education. It also constructs policies and evaluates the existing policies for the improvement in education. If all actors involved in education act as per the rules laid for them the larger functions of education are well served in society. For each of these areas, certain ethical principles were chosen to serve as guidelines for ethical practices of a teacher and other actors in education.

In the light of the aforesaid ethics, change in the status-role definitions of various status-role holders highlighted by various studies, and changes in various social institutions, the conduct of the school teachers deserve

to be looked into. For this endeavour six unprofessional practices have been identified and defined among school teachers.

4. Unprofessional Practices Defined

Absenteeism: People are not going to work or school when they should be going. Teachers are away from school during their duty hours. Those who have equation with the principal are adjusted with non-teaching duties out of the school. Others take the advantage of higher bureaucratic and political connections in abstaining from school. Kin of the members of the management in private schools, working as teachers in the school, misuse their connections in abstaining from school.

Dereliction of Duty: Dereliction of duty is the failure on the part of the people to do something that they have to do because it is the part of their job. While in the school, teachers do not teach during their teaching hours. Other leisure activities like gossiping, sitting idle in the classroom or in school canteen etc. take priority over teaching.

Lack of Responsibility: People do not have a sense of being accountable for the work or job that is necessary or wanted. School teachers are supposed to possess the knowledge and desired skill to impart that knowledge to the students. Besides transmission of knowledge, they are expected to reconstitute personalities and create productive, moral and responsible social beings. On the contrary, they lack the required zeal and commitment to do this.

Discrimination: To treat a person or a group of people differently on the basis of their skin colour, caste, class, race, religion, sex etc. A sense of universalism is lacking in the teachers. Personal whims do play a role while doing one's duties. Students are not treated without the distinction of caste, class and creed.

Authoritarianism: A manner in which total acquiescence is demanded and there is no freedom for the people to act as they wish. Total obedience is expected from the students and there is no space for empathetic understanding of their feelings.

Commercial Venality: A corrupt practice that is connected with, profit, and not quality or morality. Public funding funds the professional knowledge and skill acquired by the teachers. This knowledge should be used for the welfare of the society and students, but on the contrary it is used for individual welfare and self-development of the teachers through private tutoring.

5. Prevalence of Unprofessional Practices

Responses obtained for six identified undesirable practices among school teachers are tabulated in terms of percentages and mean values on a five point scale. On the scale magnitude of the response was taken as "5" for Strongly Agree, "4" for Fairly Agree, "3" for Agree, "2" for Disagree and "1" for Strongly Disagree for each practice. The mean values for all the responses were calculated to see the magnitude of the practice. Percentages were computed for the responses to substantiate the finding for each practice. Mean values of responses on scale are tabulated in Table 1 and percentages in Table 2 with respect to gender. The Table 1 shows that authoritarianism was highest in magnitude and discrimination the lowest. Lack of responsibility was next lower to authoritarianism followed by absenteeism and dereliction of duty.

Except discrimination against the students in which female teachers were ahead in all other five undesirable practices male teachers were the leaders.

Table 1. Relative prevalence of unprofessional practices among male and female teachers on a five point scale.

Unprofessional Practice	Male (Mean Value)	Female (Mean Value)	Total (Mean Value)
Authoritarianism	2.19	2.05	2.12
Lack of Responsibility	2.18	1.96	2.07
Absenteeism	2.21	1.85	2.03
Dereliction of Duty	2.12	1.88	2.00
Commercial Venality	1.69	1.63	1.66
Discrimination	1.60	1.70	1.65

Table 2. Prevalence of unprofessional practices among male and female teachers.

Unprofessional Practice	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Discrimination	38	34.9	71	65.1	109	19.2 (100.0)
Commercial Venality	45	45.0	55	55.0	100	17.7 (100.0)
Lack of Responsibility	45	46.9	51	53.1	96	16.9 (100.0)
Dereliction of Duty	49	51.6	46	48.4	95	16.8 (100.0)
Absenteeism	48	54.5	40	45.5	88	15.5 (100.0)
Authoritarianism	30	38.0	49	62.0	79	13.9 (100.0)
Total*	255	-	312	-	567	100.0

*Totals vary due to multiple responses.

6. Reasons for Authoritarianism

Responses obtained for reasons of authoritarian attitude among teachers are presented in Table 3. Ignorant about the significance of empathetic attitude towards students, students are not their own children, moral duty of students to obey their teachers and students are ignorant of their rights were some prominent reasons cited by teachers for the prevalence of this practice. Authoritative outlook is good for students, parents want teachers to be authoritative and got authoritative outlook from their teachers were some other less prominent reasons given by the respondents for authoritarianism. Female teachers were more vociferous while responding to the reasons for this practice than their male counterparts.

7. Authoritarianism and Autocracy

From the analysis of preliminary data collected for the prevalence of six identified undesirable practices among school teachers, there is sufficient evidence of authoritarianism among them. In a systematic study of professional role of secondary school teachers, Shah [5] notices considerable evidence of role consensus among various role definers in that they almost unanimously rejected the old authoritarian concept of the teacher's role and, instead, conceived of it in more diffuse terms. Comparing school teachers with other white-collar professionals, (Dutt 1970 [6]) finds the former lacking in professional attributes such as extended training, code of professional ethics, strong professional associations, work autonomy, etc. The work of (Derebello 1979 [7]) is on the impact of schooling on students. It presents a research project to be tried in Hyderabad and Secunderabad as a replication of a study done in California on the relationship between schooling and personal efficacy. The findings of the California study is that the more formal schooling a child received, the higher would be its rating on the personal efficacy scale. Sharma's [8] study of 770 students of Punjab University is based on to see the effect of education on modernity. He discovers that the quality and content of education and the type of early schooling, rather than education *per se*, have a role to play in inculcating modern attitudes and values. In his study of college teachers of Bombay University, Altbach [9] observes that the college teaching role is marked by a sense of "ambivalence"—a conflict between the broader ideology of the academics, which does stress research and writing, and his or her own reality, which does not. The basic structure of the college in India is autocratic with little pretence of the collegial decision-making and for this as well as several other reasons college teaching according to him, has failed to develop fully into a profession.

Analysing the internal organisational environment of college academics in Bombay, Heredia [10] has advanced significant evidence of centralisation of authority and of heavy reliance on bureaucratic criteria for decision-making. This means that there is little scope for professional autonomy among college teachers. Making a distinction between unionisation and professionalisation, he has drawn attention to such consequences of the former as the increased magnitude of bureaucratisation and politicisation, which, in turn, undermine the professionalisation potential of teacher organisation. (Srivastava 1988) [11]) in his observation on university teaching, which is considered as the sacred "mother" of professions, happen to be suffering from the combined effects of both, alienation and anomie. The noble, peace loving, truth-seeking, teaching-preaching-researching, intellectual-service-oriented life of the university teacher is not free from role ambivalence and conflicting ideologies.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to reasons for authoritarianism and sex.

Reasons	Sex				Total	
	Male		Female			
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Ignorant about empathetic attitude	16	45.7	19	54.3	35	16.4 (100.0)
Students are not their children	14	46.7	16	53.3	30	14.0 (100.0)
Moral duty of students to obey teachers	11	37.9	18	62.1	29	13.6 (100.0)
Students are ignorant of their rights	12	46.1	14	53.9	26	12.2 (100.0)
Authoritative outlook is good for students	9	39.1	14	60.9	23	10.7 (100.0)
Parents want teachers to be authoritative	8	34.8	15	65.2	23	10.7 (100.0)
Got authoritative outlook from their teachers	5	27.8	13	72.2	18	8.4 (100.0)
Students lack knowledge that teachers have	7	41.2	10	58.8	17	7.9 (100.0)
Principal and colleagues are authoritative	1	9.1	10	90.9	11	5.1 (100.0)
Others	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	0.9 (100.0)
Total[*]	84	-	130	-	214	100.0

[*]Totals vary due to multiple responses.

The first role conflict of the salaried university teacher is between his university authorities and his colleagues, both junior and senior; the second, closely linked, is the conflict between loyalty to the employer (Chancellor, Vice-chancellor, Syndicate, Senate etc.) and to clients (students who are not the pay masters) where the two parties are not one and the same.

John's study [12] is based on 390 teachers of 27 colleges affiliated to Gorakhpur University. His findings infer that gender difference, teaching experience and rural/urban background have no bearing on teachers' professional values but minority community managed college teachers have higher professional values than their counterparts of non-minority community managed colleges. Same trend is found in terms of professional growth of the college teachers. In terms of principal's decision making style, those who followed heuristic type of decision making style have direct bearing on teacher's professional growth and values, than those, who followed supportive, compromise and routine type of decision making style. Chauhan's work [13] is based on 700 teachers working in 52 government and privately managed high schools in the state of Haryana. The study is based mainly on three professional aspects of teachers, namely, professional responsibility, teaching attitude and organisational climate. One of the significant findings of the study is that gender difference and type of the school have no bearing on the professional responsibility of the teachers. In terms of attitude towards teaching, government schoolteachers have higher degree as compared to their private school counterparts but gender difference has no bearing towards teaching attitude. He found that there is hardly any difference in the organisational climate of both type of schools. Teaching attitude and organisational climate jointly contribute for the variance of teacher's professional responsibility.

In a study conducted by Fulu [14] on men and violence in Asia and Pacific, sexual entitlement—the "belief that men are entitled to sex regardless of consent"—was the top reason men gave for committing a rape. The study suggested that our priority must be to work with boys and adolescents to change social norms and behaviour to prevent perpetration of rape—this includes programmes that enhance the knowledge and skills of young people and help them to understand gender equality, healthy sexual practices, consent and foster respectful relationships. Caleb's study [15] on the crisis faced by Indian school education has highlighted that the proactive involvement of community and a highly motivated headmaster could bring a change in the education system. The literature also points to the need for synergy between the three—headmaster, parents and community and local self governance institutions. Where the three came together, the school governance improved.

It is obvious from these observations that authoritarianism and autocracy has no place either in any of the social institutions or in the larger society.

8. Conclusion

The health of a society is determined by its value system. Some values (truth, justice, equality, humanism, tolerance, peace, etc.) are necessary for its survival and other (excellence, commitment, studiousness, honesty, empathy, etc.) are desirable. In every society the value system is always in constant flux in terms of time and space. According to the account of Emile Durkheim the value system of any society is dependent upon its school system and the designate of the society for the transmission of value system is the schoolteacher. The values prevalent in the society are determined by the values inculcated at the school. If the mundane values (social position, power, wealth, material possessions, etc.) are prevalent in the society that means that are inculcated at the school system and obviously the teachers are in possession of them. The data from this preliminary study show the prevalence of authoritarianism, one of the six undesirable practices investigated among the school teachers. The very first principle of code of ethics for school teachers is that the primary obligation of teaching profession is to prepare the students in the ways of democracy. But in reality antithesis of democracy is prevalent and being nurtured in the schools. The reasons cited for this practice in the study were that teachers were not aware about its consequences for the students. Moreover, teachers were least bothered about the students because they were not their kith and kin. Poor awareness about their rights while in the school was another reason that came out in the study. Authoritarianism was prevalent and still prevailing so has become a tradition irrespective of its effects on the tender minds.

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