

# Supporting Young Children's Emotional Well-being in Classroom: Teachers' Belief and Attitude<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Emotional well-being of students is a concern in Early Childhood Development programs. It is necessary to explore teacher's belief and understanding about young children's emotional health to have an idea about the prevailing situation. Following pilot interviews, four schools were selected through purposive sampling with the aim of exploring the issues by interviewing teachers and observing classes. For in-depth investigation, the qualitative research approach was chosen. As part of data collection, eight pre-primary and primary grade classrooms were observed by two observers' and eight in-depth interviews with the class-teachers were held. This was followed by two FGD sessions with teachers. The major findings of the study showed that the teachers had an understanding and some preconceived belief about young-learner's emotional well-being, but this understanding and belief often were not reflected in the real teaching-learning process. The recommendations from the study suggest the need for further large scale research for better understanding and evidence, a case for assessing aptitude and personality traits of would-be teachers, as well as training/work-shop for teachers and concerned education personnel on children's emotional well-being.*

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## Introduction

According to World Health Organization (1978, para. 2), "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Health and well-being emphasize and determine children's responses to their environment, to people and to new experience (Silver Springs Primary Academy, 2007). All children have complex and varied emotional needs. When children are in a state of good health and their emotional needs are met, they feel naturally happy, secure, confident and curious. A lack of emotional support at this stage can negatively affect all areas of a child's development – physical, cognitive, social and emotional.

A healthy emotional state of young children leads to the development of coping strategies when they face new, challenging or stressful situations. This also serves as a building block for healthy behavior and educational attainment. According to UK's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence public health guidelines (2012), poor social and emotional capabilities in early life increase the likelihood of antisocial behavior, mental health problems, teenage pregnancy, poor educational attainment and involvement in criminal activity.

It is evident from research findings that teachers' attitudes, values, beliefs and practices concerning children's mental well-being are inextricably linked with their constructions of childhood (Thornton, 2011). A study conducted by Marlowe, Disney & Wilson (2004) on managing children with emotional and behavioral issues in classroom indicated that teacher's managing strategies in classroom situation require an in-depth knowledge of what causes students' behavior problems. A case study on classroom situation at primary level in Bangladesh by Hossain, Imam, Amin, Rahman, & Ghosh, (2003) revealed that an easy-going environment, constructive criticism and reward for good performance were seldomevident during lesson presentation. The study also found inadequate individual attention towards slow learners. This study finding established the importance of positive environment and recognition which are vital for a child's emotional well-being. To support children's emotional well-being and to create the child friendly teaching learning situation, the researchers thought it was necessary to explore teacher's belief and attitude towards the child's well-being focusing on socio-emotional development of the child.

## Statement of the Problem

Early childhood period, which is from birth to eight years of a human life, is a critical time in terms of children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) at Vanderbilt University in USA defines social-emotional development as the developing capacity of the child from birth through 5 years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; to experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and in culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn (CSEFEL, 2008).

Teacher's insight on different influences on young children's development and learning was explored through interviews with school teachers in Dhaka. From those interviews of teachers, the issue to focus on teacher's belief and attitude in regards to children's socio-emotional well-being was identified. No significant effort and activities as part of pedagogy have been noticed regarding children's emotional well-being in Bangladesh. Lack of information on teacher's belief and attitudes regarding children's emotional well-being suggests that the issue is still neglected in Bangladesh. The researchers argued that teacher's beliefs and attitudes were important because their beliefs and personal thoughts influenced classroom teaching practices; hence it was necessary to probe the issue (Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak & Johnson, 2001).

The findings of this study may indicate the need for further research on young children's emotional well-being in the context of Bangladesh. The study might also be helpful to create awareness among the teachers and other concerned personnel on the issue of social and emotional well-being of children.

### **Conceptual Background of the Study**

There is a general consensus that childhood physical, emotional and social well-being also affect their later lives as adults (Statham & Chase, 2010). Researchers have also begun to focus on positive aspects of mental health and emotional well-being which influence how children act, behave, feel, communicate their feelings and get along with others (Fauth & Thompson, 2009).

According to Commodari (2013), children's secure base behavior in relationship to their preschool teachers is related to social competence and most of the cognitive and behavioral skills involved in school readiness. In another study Thijs & Koomen (2008) showed that teachers' support had a strong, positive link with children's emotional security. It also showed that emotional security appears to play an important role in academic functioning of young children.

Beliefs are generally considered to be subjective mental interpretations based on perceptions, reasoning or communication (Paro, Siepak & Scott-Little, 2009). Even though beliefs are hidden in people's heart, they are the foundation of people's behavior, guiding people's decision-making as well as their general thinking process (Wang, 2000). Teacher's belief, popularly known as teachers' efficacy, is related to the capacity to affect student's performances (Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Pajares (1992) probing the relation of teacher's belief to their teaching practices at classroom concluded that:

The beliefs that teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behavior in the classroom, so that understanding the belief structures of teachers and teacher candidates is essential to improving their professional preparation and teaching practices. (p.309)

Every single teacher carries belief (Pajares, 1992) and teachers' beliefs play the foundational role in determining the teaching approaches in the classroom (Banu, 2011). Teachers' beliefs impact their classroom practices because those personal beliefs are closely related to the decision-making process, the implementation of teaching practices, and daily interaction with children (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Vartuli, 1999). Bandura (1997) stated that teachers are very much influenced by these beliefs about how they will persist to deal with obstacles and failure in the classroom (Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Moreover, factors such as violence, conflict, abuse at home, community or in school, the social and emotional realities in classroom like gender, race, religion, social status etc. have vast impact on a student's psychology in the school (Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Teacher's belief can significantly influence these factors (Ashton, Olejnik, Crocker & Mcauliffle, 1988). In this regard, findings from the study of Guskey & Passaro, (1994) can be noted that teacher's belief can also influence greatly even those students who are unmotivated and difficult to control (Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

In preschool years, teachers ensure child's safety, calm them down when they are upset, and control their temperament like parents. Thus, young child's relationship with their teachers reflects the quality of the emotional connection between the two groups. Research shows that positive relationship with teachers in the classroom is significantly associated with children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Teachers' positive interaction requires comprehensive knowledge about the age and stages of development, age appropriate stimulation and communication with young children. Teachers have an imperative role in students' emotional well-being because they shape the formal learning context and the social and emotional climate of the school. Studies have shown that students benefit from good relationships with teachers and from the motivation they provide and the discussions teachers lead (in class or individually); particularly in relation to learning how to manage feelings when coping with stress (Bernard, Stephanou, & Urbach, 2007).

### **Research Objectives**

This study aimed to explore teachers' belief and attitude in supporting preschooler's/young children's emotional well-being in classroom situation. The expectation was to examine the teachers' perception in relation to children's emotional well-being.

The specific objectives were –

- To explore teachers' belief and understanding on emotional well-being of young children in their care;
- To understand teachers' attitude towards addressing the social and emotional needs of children in classroom.

## Operational Definitions

*Social and emotional well-being.* Broadly, social and emotional well-being refers to the way a person thinks and feels about themselves and others. It includes being able to adapt and deal with daily challenges (resilience and coping skills) while leading a fulfilling life (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012, p.8).

Social and emotional well-being incorporates both the individual characteristics of the child, and those of environments such as families, schools and communities. Hamilton & Redmond (2010) propose a conceptualisation of social and emotional well-being in applied research as two interdependent domains:

### **Belief:**

Dewey (1933, p.6) described belief in these words: "It covers all the matters of which we have no sure knowledge and yet which we are sufficiently confident of to act upon and also the matters that we now accept as certainly true as knowledge, but which nevertheless may be questioned in the future." In operational terms, it refers to an abstract state of believing in something as being important. Knowledge is justified true belief, or true opinion combined with reason.

### **Perception:**

The way in which someone regards something; the natural ability to understand or notice something quickly; a view of a phenomenon that is purely subjective (Ahsan, 2012). In operational terms, it refers to the way in which the participants see the reality about themselves, others and the teaching-learning contexts.

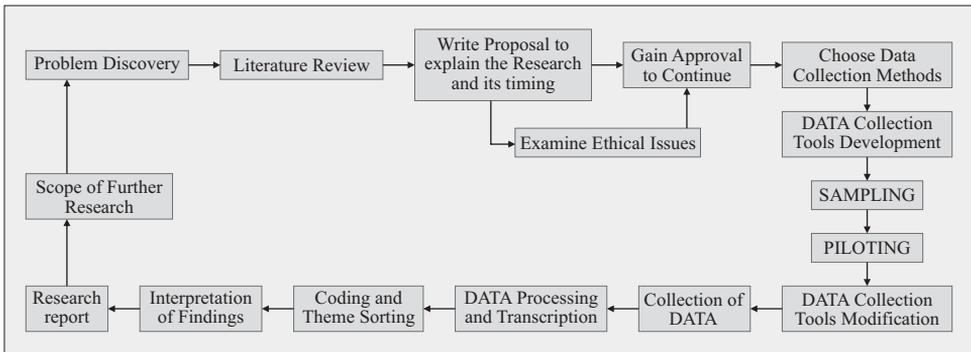
### **Attitude:**

Attitude refers to "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). In operational terms, attitude is defined as a complex mental state involving beliefs, feelings, values and dispositions to act in certain ways.

## Methodology

The study utilized qualitative approach involving classroom observations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) as the data (teacher's belief & attitude) are qualitative in nature. Research areas were selected purposively both from rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. To collect required data two types of schools; public (government) and private, were selected for the study. In this research teachers were the samples of the study. Eight teachers of pre-primary and Grade I from four schools were interviewed and full class hours were observed for three consecutive days. Altogether thirteen teachers including head teachers were selected for two focus group discussions. Thus a total of 21 (8+13) teachers were selected for the research.

All accumulated data including journals and field notes were transcribed and cleaned methodically. Afterwards the entire body of data was arranged and preserved in different categories. Before starting the data analysis process, objectives and key research questions were reviewed by the research team to better articulate the purpose of the research. Next, several sessions of group reading were conducted to systematically check the data. While reviewing the data, researchers' own thoughts and ideas regarding each theme or issues were noted down separately. Prioritization was done to select the strong data. Data which powerfully narrated the issue were identified as representative data. Then, based on the emergent themes, data were categorized, organized sequentially and coded. Analysis was carried out according to different themes and patterns, and result and discussion points were written down. In this research inter-method triangulation was used to ensure the validity of data. The diagram in Figure 1 shows the complete process followed in this research:



*Figure 1:* Diagram of research process

This research followed principles and guidelines that are ethically and morally correct. Ethical issues of this research were reviewed by two experts. Permission was taken from the school authorities prior to data collection, thereby ensuring that personal or institutional identities kept anonymous.

## Findings

Themes identified and presented in this section are important and interlinked either directly or indirectly with one another. Patterns and categories were identified by examining interview transcripts, FGD transcripts, observation notes and journals text. Priority was given to the data which were relevant to the research questions. Subsequently data were organized into different themes and sub themes.

The following are the two key themes derived from the reviewed data:

- Teacher's belief and understanding on emotional well-being of young children
- Teacher's attitude towards addressing social-emotional needs of children

### **1. Teacher's belief and understanding on emotional well-being of young children**

It is very important for a teacher to have clear understanding about emotional well-being of young children. This theme has been analyzed into a few sub-themes, e.g., perception and teacher's concern towards special needs children and understanding and knowledge on child behavior.

#### ***Teacher's perception***

This sub-theme reflects certain common factors which constitute teachers' perception about teacher–student relationship, formal assessment of young children's class performance, how to hold children's attention in class and attract them to school, child's holistic development and emotional needs.

In aspects of teacher-student relationship, most of the research participants hold a very positive mind set. They believe that children respond better when they are dealt with affection but they prefer to be somewhat strict in order to get the best outcome. The issue was described in a positive manner by a research participant:

We should not behave with the children in such a way that they start disliking their school. When they come to school in the beginning of the session it is difficult to handle them. Then gradually it gets easier when a rapport is established between the children and the teachers. Teachers need to control themselves and refrain from scolding the children. Otherwise, these children might stop coming to school. (Interview, 10.9.13)

The research participants possessed knowledge on how to hold children's attention in class and attract them to school. A participant shared her knowledge that instead of pressurizing the children they let them learn at their own time and pace. The following observation provides some light in this regard:

Children should be given time and those who are lagging behind will gradually learn. It is permissible to be slightly angry or scold them softly, like, *Why can't you do this? You have to do this*. The reasons why children like to come to school are: less academic activities and more extracurricular activities, rhymes, songs, physical exercise, playing with resource tools and art. (Interview, 10.9.13)

Data revealed that research participants are able to perceive and acknowledge children's emotional needs. They are aware of the fact that children long for recognition and want to be appreciated by their teachers. Data from a rural private school showed how the teacher shared her thoughts about children's emotional needs and its positive impact in their life:

The small children may have various types of questions which the adults may find unnecessary. No matter how unnecessary their questions are, teachers should listen to them and explain to them. The way I behave with them, instilled certain behavior in them, they will behave the same way when they grow up. It is just like a ball, if I throw a ball towards a wall, it will come back to me in the same speed. Therefore, I believe, teachers should behave with the children with patience and help them differentiate between right and wrong. (Interview, 01.10.13)

It was also found that teacher showed sincere concern and gave priority to a child's emotional needs and addressed them with great affection. The following is the description of a participant on this issue:

One day I came to know that his father was missing. He came to class after one week. His eyes were swollen which made me feel sad. I consoled him saying that his father would come back and I did not pressurize him with his studies. I tried to engage him in enjoyable activities and make him feel better. Called him to the board and asked him questions in class and applauded at whatever he answered. When his father came back he became really happy and said that teacher assured him that his father would come back soon and he did. (Interview, 10.9.13)

The data obtained from the research participants of both rural and urban schools express the same understanding and concern about children's emotional needs. They perceive it to be very crucial for a child's life to acknowledge and take care of their emotional needs.

Group of data presented in this segment illustrated participant's improper perception about special need. Confusion between autism and hyperactivity was observed. Data from an interview in an urban private school revealed that teacher hold a misconception regarding hyperactivity. Teacher termed hyperactivity as autism.

The autistic child in my class used to do different types of weird activities, like, poured water in the classroom, took off her shoes and carried them on her head, took off her clothes and so on. The child used to complete her tasks very swiftly and then want to get everybody else's attention. She was very restless and had to be engaged in activities of her type. (Interview, 22.9.13)

The gathered data showed both rural and urban participants are conscious and empathetic about the special need children in regards to individualized care and respect.

### ***Teacher's Understanding***

The reviewed data helped to explore different aspects of teachers' understanding regarding child behavior, joyful learning, gender, deviant behavior, decision making, leadership and abuse. The research participants have positive understanding and knowledge on child behavior. They are treating their students as their own children. They added that besides studying, they need time for exploring the outer classroom environment. Most of the participants have similar view regarding child behavior. Teacher stated that: "This is very

natural that young children tend to be naughty. Even though, we try our best to manage them.” (Interview, 15.9.2013).

It was observed that both urban and rural government school research participants have their own level of understanding regarding joyful learning. However, no data related to this issue was found in private schools of urban and rural settings.

The collected data suggest a different view of teachers regarding gender issues. Most of the teachers mentioned that these children were very young to understand the gender facts. One of the teachers in a rural school stated: “I want my students not to be concerned about gender issues at this early age. They should be human beings first. They should forget who is a boy and who is a girl at school.” (Interview, 2.10.2013)

Moreover, some schools practice gender discrimination during school admission. They have a mindset that boys are naughtier than girls. One of the research participants described in her interview that: “Boys are generally naughtier than girls. In our school every section has only 6/8 boys where total class size is 30. Girls are preferable. School authority decided to admit fewer boys to maintain the school discipline.” (Interview, 22.09.2013)

However, it also revealed teachers’ wrong understanding regarding trans-sexuality. They commented that: “A transgender personality never comes to school.” (FGD, 07.10.2013)

Teachers’ understanding regarding children’s deviant behavior was illustrated through this study. Very few teachers have the clear and multi faceted understanding about the aggressive or deviant behavior of the children. One of the interview participants stated: “I tried to keep my aggressive student busy with work, like brining me the duster, cleaning the blackboard, doing class work etc. Sometimes I used to keep him away from other boys so that he cannot disturb others.” (Interview, 2.10.2013)

Some teachers had other kinds of misconception regarding deviant behavior of children. They argued that deviant behavior came from food habit, family education and practice. One teacher mentioned: “Formalin in food makes the children aggressive” (Interview, 09.09.2013). Teachers believed that using slang words, fighting with peers, and less attention in the classroom is the result of family practices which was stated in FGD as: “I think these things comes from family. They use the slang words which, I think they learn from the family.” (FGD, 7.10.2013)

The following observation of a teacher illustrates pre-conceived judgment regarding children’s participation in decision making process. The teacher exclaimed- How can a student be involved in making a decision! Another participant in the interview was surprised and seemed to be irritated when she was asked about students’ participation in decision making process. She questioned, “What kind of decision can be made by a young child?” (Interview, 08.09.2013)

Teacher's understanding on leadership represented a conservative view. Teachers perceived that leadership was an inborn quality. It could not be nurtured or acquired. As one teacher commented, "All students cannot be a leader. Everything is not for everyone. If I give responsibility to someone who is not capable of doing that, then it will be a mess." (Interview, 9.9.2013)

## **2. Teacher's attitude towards addressing social-emotional needs of children**

Teacher's attitude was understood through their intentions expressed during interviews and class observations. This theme is analyzed based on a few subthemes: teacher's attitude towards child behavior, teacher's attitude towards teaching and teacher's expression of attitude. Selected description along with analysis and interpretation are presented below.

### ***Teacher's attitude towards child behavior***

It was observed that, teacher's exhibited both positive and negative attitude towards child behavior.

The teacher's shared some common positive views towards child's behavior. Most teachers adored children and their behavior; were understanding about children being naughty; provided necessary break between activities; showed patience when dealing with children, and also tried to develop effective communication with them. The most appreciable attitude exhibited was that generally teachers considered students as their own children. Some key descriptions illustrating positive attitudes towards children are noted below.

One participant expressed that a child's behavior was pleasing and a source of enjoyment. She mentioned: "Actually when they come to class, their behavior is attractive and charming. I like a lot of things about them. This automatically comes from my inner-self. I do not need to force myself to like them." (Interview, 10.9.2013)

A research participant expressed the need to explore the reason behind child's certain behavior. She explained: "The teacher needs to understand which child is naughty and why he is behaving like this." (Interview, 1.10.2013). Another participant had an ambiguous view: "Sometimes the students' naughtiness made me angry. It is normal for a child to be naughty just like my own child. So if I can manage my own child, then I can manage naughty students too." (Interview, 15.9.2013).

The participants also showed negative attitudes towards the young children's behavior. Some seemed to assume that all students were mostly naughty. As one commented, "Although some children look innocent, they are quite good at engaging in naughty activities." (Interview, 8.9.2013).

When the teacher exhibits negative attitude towards child's behavior, it may lead to a situation where the child's state of social-emotional well-being is hampered and the child's overall development is adversely affected. The following excerpt sheds light on an observer's view regarding the danger of teacher's negative attitude towards child behavior:

How old should be a play-group child to understand what to do when they are in the class? They are made to learn just like a machine, they are not considered to be capable of understanding anything. There were no scopes for playing. They cannot speak, cannot laugh; they just have to follow teacher's order. To them education will not be something pleasant, rather a bad memory (Journal, 23.9.2013).

It was illustrated by the following observation that there was a negative attitude among the participant regarding peer talking which is a very natural tendency of a child. Sometimes the teacher threatened to send them out of the class. A participant said to a young student: "I will close your mouth with tape. I really do not like to talk too much. I will send you out of this class." (Observation, 8.9.2013)

### ***Teachers' attitude towards teaching***

Data processed from observation and interview sources indicated three types of attitude of teachers - positive, harsh and ignorant. Teachers tried to show positive attitude in teaching, but sometimes they became harsh and other times ignored students' activities or were indifferent to student behavior.

Data revealed some aspects of teacher's positive attitude towards teaching. For example: helpfulness in child's learning, understanding child's mental age and communicating with them on this basis taking into account children's level of understanding, providing scope of participating in teaching-learning process, promoting questioning, helping slow learners, not to pressurize the children during teaching-learning process, prioritizing student's feeling and addressing children's interest towards learning. The following excerpt illustrates research participant's positive behavior towards a young learner seeking help in the classroom:

Many children come and ask me to draw the margin-line in their copybook. If I shout at them, they would never come to me. The girl knows madam would draw the margin for her. I have seen that if I draw the margin in their copybook, their hand-writing gets clear and it helps me to check their copy. (Interview, 16.9.2013)

Another research participant shed light on this issue regarding student's failure to complete lesson. The participant commented:

He did not learn his lesson that day. I did not tell anything to him as he was also feeling sorry about it. If I rebuked him, he would have been unhappy. I did not tell him anything. I just told him that one day was not a big deal; you just learn your lesson for tomorrow. (Interview, 2.10.2013)

This clearly states a teacher's view regarding students who fail to learn the day's lesson. She not only was opposed to rebuking the learner but showed her intention to motivate the student to learn the lesson the next day.

Observation data revealed that many teachers used harsh words and showed harsh behavior with young learners'. They threatened the children to beat them up; and made them frightened by the description of fearful events. The teacher also shouted at the children while checking their copies and other class proceedings.

An item d from a journal entry suggested that the teachers were not demonstrating a positive attitude in teaching but threatening students with physical punishment: "Teachers used harsh language, humiliated the students as and when they wished, beat them, made them stand in front of the class holding their own ears. (Journal, 10.9.2013)"

More harsh comments of the teacher were noted in the description from an observer: "Teacher scolded a kid while copy checking, *Are you deaf? Why aren't you listening to me?*" (Observation, 8-9-2013)"

The teacher clearly threatened the students and created a fearful situation in the children's mind. The following excerpt provides a real picture in this regard: "Teacher told the student they would l be in class one in a higher section next year. Teacher would l be sitting with stick there. *The teacher would l punish you. They would lock you in a dark room with frog, cockroach, lizards etc.* (Observation, 23.9.2013)"

Another teacher humiliated a student for making a mistake described as: "And where did the number 10 go? To your father's house or your grandfather's house? (Observation, 15.9.2013)"

During teaching learning an event was observed that provided an example of harsh punishment:

The students who could not finish their class work of English were asked to go to the teacher's desk. Teacher then sent them to another room with a support staff. She instructed the support staff not to turn on the fan. These students will stay in scorching weather as their punishment. Almost 10 students were sent to the room in this manner. (Observation, 22.9.2013)

The description clearly suggests that the teacher showed a very harsh attitude towards the slow learners and became very rude if they failed to complete their homework.

The last aspect of teacher's attitude was attention to student's concerns and needs. Sometimes the teachers clearly exhibited neglect of the children and their activities, while they were in classroom. During class observation, it was evident that the teacher had a tendency to ignore slow learners who were the backbenchers. In respect to the responsibility performed by a class monitor the observer sheds light on the issue of teacher's tendency to ignore slow learners. The observer reported:

The student who was the unannounced monitor deals with the class mates even worse than the teachers. He beats with steel ruler, pushes, and even boxes freely. If anyone complains against him, the teachers seem reluctant. In a way, the teachers encourage

him to bully his classmates. This was seen in the music class, where the teacher could not control the class and he totally relied on the boy and allowed him to do whatever he feels like to control the class (Journal, 9.9.2013).

This was not the only situation where teacher's tendency to ignore pupils and even subject them to abuse was visible. Another observer explained the situation of the backbenchers:

They were considered too naughty and hyper compared to others. It seemed to me that they like to seat at the back benches and teachers gladly allowed them to sit back because they want to separate the hyper student from others. That was not a solution; they were lagging further behind day by day. (Observation, 2.10.2013)

In addition to the back benchers the teachers also ignored some other students too. The following excerpt provides some information in this regard:

While teacher was helping some students to write down their name, some other students were gossiping, some were fighting, and some were lay down on the floor. There was simply chaos in the classroom and teacher did not give much attention to that. (Observation, 10.9.2013)

The expression of teacher's negligent approach can be explained by an observer's journal entry: "The class proceedings could be described as traditional. But, the most upsetting matter to me was that three different teachers did not even look at the students properly, who were engaged in disruption or not following instruction (Journal, 2.10.2013)."

The most important matter about teacher student rapport is eye contact. But, here the teacher did not care to look around the class. This expressed an attitude of grave negligence on the part of the teacher in respect to essential element of teaching-learning.

On the whole, it can be said that the teachers have a common attitude to ignore or be indifferent to children when they were disruptive or uninterested in classroom activities. The teachers, in these instances, failed to take the right initiatives to engage children in class activities and did not play the part of a facilitator properly.

### ***Teacher's expression of attitude***

Teacher attitude was observed in respect of teacher interaction with students -- sharing feelings with students, promoting child's creativity, dealing with aggressive behavior, in meting out punishment, and also in terms of praising/recognizing student performance. Here only a few issues and events will be discussed in an illustrative way.

The appropriate and positive expression of attitude on the teacher's part would be a friendly interaction with children, or demonstration of child-friendliness. Data showed that rural private school teachers expressed more child friendly behavior compared to other sample schools. Class observation data showed that teachers generally spoke in a child friendly manner and with patience. An observer reported: "The facial expression of the teacher is child friendly, inspiring and caring. She is capable of making things understandable to the

children. She asked how the student came to school. It seemed students were not afraid of that teacher.” (Observation, 11.09.2013)

However, in some classes and schools teacher’s expressions were uncongenial and their facial expression was emotionless or rude which is wholly undesirable in primary grades. Their way of talking was harsh and over bearing. For example, a teacher told his students, “*If you talk today; I will get you out from class by pulling your ears. Are you deaf, why I had to call you twice?*” (Journal, 23.9.2013)

The consequences of rude, expressionless and indifferent communication by teacher are commented upon in a journal excerpt:

I have a feeling that the students have a natural tendency to imitate their teachers unknowingly. They shout loudly, hit each other and pull and push the way they see their teachers do. They do not bother to use any polite language like *sorry, please or excuse me* as they are unfamiliar with these expressions (Journal, 9.9.2013)

Another pertinent category of expressions of attitude on the teacher’s part was their action in providing scope for sharing of feeling on the part of students. The evidence presented here provides some insights regarding teacher attitude on sharing student’s feelings with teacher. Observations from an urban government school showed that students shared their personal feelings or ideas with teacher. For example one of the students told the teacher that he was sad because his younger brother had pain in teeth. (Observation, 11.09.2013) Another student suggested to the teacher: “Madam, let us fix a day when everybody in our class will come to the school wearing the new cloth brought on last Eid” (Observation, 11.09.2013). This showed that students had a good relationship with teacher and they felt free to express their emotions. To have some personal talk during class, teachers smiling or offering positive response to students or just listening to their personal story encouraged students to feel free and be at ease.

A teacher showed positive attitude to inspire sharing among students. The following is an illustration in this regard:

During break time the teacher encouraged students to share food with those who did not bring food from home. Almost all students offered food to those who did not bring any. During interview, the teacher said that was the practice of their school from play group to encourage sharing and fellow-feeling among students. (Observation, 22.9.2013)

However, in urban private school the scenario was different. Emotional needs and support are generally overlooked by the teachers. Observation data describe done case: “One boy for the last 3 days repeatedly cried and remained gloomy. The boy sat quietly and was sad. However, the teacher did not notice him at all.” (Observation, 9.9.2013) An observers journal excerpts can be noted to explain the matter:

Teachers do not have any time to pay attention to student's emotional needs. The class teacher and the math teacher also reiterated the fact that there was no spare time for them to look into such issues. It really made me sad to see that most of the teachers never thought of spending some time with the students to have some personal talk, inquire about their feelings, or even take a closer look at them. Their primary concern was to check the load of copies within the class hour. (Journal, 9.9.2013)

The aspect of the teacher's attitudes related to discrimination deserves to be noted. Three types of discrimination were visible during the data collection process related to: Gender, Academic Performance and Religion.

In respect to gender, it appears not to be a critical issue in the sample schools and classrooms observed. It is observed that teachers generally treated the boys and girls equally. In choosing teaching method, teacher showed gender sensitivity. Following is an observation in this regard: "Teacher draws some picture to teach math class. She uses both the picture of flower and balls. Clearly, she is trying to balance gender in every aspects of class consciously or unconsciously" (Observation, 11.9.2013).

It is observed that gender issue is used as a class management technique in rural private school. Intentionally, the teacher, in a particular case, made a difference between boys and girls to motivate students to perform. She told the boys that if they continued to do what they were doing, then she would have them seat in the middle of the girls' row. The boys showed their displeasure at such a prospect. The teacher in this instance was trying to use the cultural norms related to gender to encourage appropriate behavior and performance.

Teacher's attitude expressed during the teaching-learning process showed discrimination regarding child's academic performance. The following is an excerpt in this regard:

Teachers have a tendency to ask questions to those who usually answer in class and ignore those who need more care for academic improvement. Teacher brought those students to front of the class who could not answer and praised those who answered her questions. Those students not performing well feel embarrassed. (Journal, 10.9.2013)

Another observation indicated that hyper active children choose the back benches to sit and teacher also allows that. She wants that comparatively good students seat in the front.. "The teacher told the class that the students who are good in mathematics are more intelligent. He also said that only intelligent students went to study science in secondary. He implied that students who do not have science in their secondary course are less intelligent." (Observation, 5.10.2013).

No discrimination was observed in teacher's attitude in terms of student's age, social status or religion.

Another aspect of the teacher's attitude was observed while there was a particular situation when a student was bullied. In an urban private school, none of the teachers were aware of bullying as a serious problem in class. An explanation of the phenomenon and its handling, as explained by a teacher, was: "I cannot give punishment to children because they are small or big; all of the students are same to me. If students hit each other I scold verbally who has hit and console the bullied child. This works even in severe cases; the bullied child stops crying immediately." (Interview, 08.09.13)

This narrative and explanation underestimate the problem and indicates inadequate recognition and awareness of the problem of bullying among children. This phenomenon is not uncommon or unexpected among children and indifference to the problem cannot be helpful in coping with it and preventing it from becoming a cause of emotional distress to children.

### **Discussion**

The research findings indicated that teachers have awareness regarding the concept of children's holistic development. Most of the teachers perceive a positive understanding regarding students' health and hygiene, cleanliness and positive impact of physical activities. Moreover, teachers have a perception regarding the importance and value of an amiable relationship with the children in order to help them settle in class and attract them to school. The study suggests that government school teachers have the knowledge and understanding of child-friendly behavior. They were most affectionate to children and willing to establish friendly relationship with students. But in urban private schools the scenario was different. This study results revealed that teachers are able to perceive and acknowledge children's emotional needs. They perceive it to be very crucial for a child's life to acknowledge and take care of their emotional needs.

The teachers are aware of the fact that children expect recognition and want to be appreciated by their teachers. However, not much evidence was found in regard to teacher's perception on special need children. Research findings pointed out teachers' lack of understanding regarding children's deviant behavior. Government school teachers appear to have somewhat better understanding of deviant behavior of children. Thus, they tried to manage their students in a positive way. But the private school teachers have misconceptions on this issue.

According to Rudasill (2011), children's bi-directional interactions with teachers are important for their successful transition to formal school. Our study also supports that, the teacher-student relationship was more bi-directional in nature as visible during the observation of the classroom. Teachers' possess positive attitude towards child's behavior, adore children; their attitude reflect concern about children, and demonstrate consideration and patience towards child's behavior.

This research showed that most of the school teachers hold a positive view regarding child friendly behavior; however, their attitude and behavior in the classroom practice often did not reflect their views about teacher-student rapport. The limited evidence from the study indicated that teachers in rural private schools attitude expressed more child friendly behavior. This agrees with a research done by Aboud (2006) who found that rural preschools demonstrated a child-friendly approach to learning.

It is well recognized that child-centered, developmentally appropriate instructional strategies promote a classroom climate conducive to children's healthy emotional development (Dunn & Kontos, 1998, p. 10). It was revealed from the research result that teaching-learning process was child-centered in some instances, with application of participatory method which was aiding child's emotional well-being. In contrast, the study also documented teachers' demonstration of harsh and negative attitude. Some of the teachers used harsh language and showed harsh behavior with young learners. Negative attitude was manifested through research participant's stereotype attitude and behavior in a conventional teacher-centred classroom. Some teachers threatened children with severe consequences for errant activities in class, rudely dealt with peer talking, and caused panic among children by describing fearful consequences of inappropriate student behavior. It was a common scene in the classroom that teachers screamed at children while checking their copies and carrying out other class proceedings. The teacher's insensitive attitude was observed especially towards slow learners. Contrary to expectation, it was observed that more experienced teachers' exhibited relatively harsher attitude. A study from Hossain et al. (2003) also observed inadequate individual attention towards slow learners.

Teachers of non-government schools have required formal educational qualifications and many are trained, but their emphasis in the classroom was more on class-work and homework. It was the researchers' assumption that the situation in non-government schools would be found comparatively better than government schools in respect of attention to student's emotional well-being, but data revealed an opposite picture. Data suggest that non-government school teachers tend to give priority to academic attainment rather than young learner's emotional well-being.

The findings, based on the limited scope of the study, gave somewhat neutral impression of peer to peer interaction, teacher student relationship, scope of sharing feeling and teacher's promoting peer sharing. Teachers provided some scope to students for sharing feelings in the classroom. Shared positive emotional experiences between care givers and children serve as building blocks for the development of social and emotional well-being in infants and toddlers (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). Students wanted to share a lot of things in the classroom, but sometimes teachers were not willing to listen to the children, and sometimes they stopped students abruptly. But, students were generally helpful to each other. They helped their peers to complete class work and with other study issues. They shared learning materials and tiffin

among themselves. Teachers also motivated peer sharing at times by exchanging textbooks, copies, pencils and tiffin. Students generally hold a warm feeling for their teachers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study was conducted to explore teacher's beliefs and understanding regarding young learners' emotional well-being. It can be concluded from this study that teachers were generally concerned about children and had a broad understanding of various classroom issues, but in terms of behavior and classroom practices, significant gaps existed between teachers' awareness and knowledge and their actual behavior in the classroom. Teachers' positive approaches, especially when this is manifested in their interaction with children, can assist in developing effective communication with children, whereas teacher's negative attitude creates a feeling of disappointment and fear in children's mind which hampers young learners' emotional well-being.

The study reflected variations in teachers' responses to addressing children's emotional needs in classroom situation. Overall, it can be said that teachers prioritized children's academic attainment rather than their emotional needs. The results of the study, based on exploration and interpretation of different observation and interviews, revealed that teacher's had pre-conceived views and more or less rigid beliefs regarding different aspects of young learners' emotional well-being. There was a noticeable gap between teacher's belief and understanding and classroom practices. The study suggested a need for further development of awareness and understanding, accumulation of knowledge and the translation of these in classroom practices. These can be achieved with the implementation of a number recommendations, proposed on the basis of the findings of the present study:

- A nationwide teachers' sample survey in relation to protecting and promoting young learners' emotional well-being could be undertaken to provide a clearer picture of what is being experienced across the country.
- Based on evidence about teachers' awareness and knowledge about emotional health of children, classroom practices and effects on children, the feasibility and appropriate methods for assessing aptitude and personality traits of teachers before their recruitment into the teaching profession should be considered.
- There can be day-long work-shops to enhance teacher's and education management personnel's understanding of socio-emotional well-being of children which would lead to a conducive classroom learning environment for young learners.
- Effective communication between teachers and parents can help teacher to take an interest regarding children's emotional well-being. This communication can be improved through monthly parent-teacher meeting and sharing sessions on a regular basis.

- Developing and conducting in-service training on children's emotional well-being among the primary and pre-primary teachers and teachers trainers can be an effective step. Monthly refresher training of teachers can also have a component on and opportunity to discuss the important aspects of children's emotional need.
- Course units within the course for M.Sc in Early Childhood Development programme can pay greater attention to the component of emotional well-being of children and teacher and management role in this respect. .
- As teachers are the focal point in dealing with children in the classroom setting, their active involvement should be ensured in all the areas of education. This includes their role in school policy formulation to classroom implementation, i.e., syllabus design, allocation of classroom contact hours and planning of curricular and co-curricular activities. This will help the teachers to address and manage the emotional needs of the children more empathetically.

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