

Communicating Community Environment of Junior High School Students in the First Congressional District of Northern Samar, Philippines: Inputs to School-Students-Community Relations

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the community environment, particularly the learning and social communities of junior high school students in the first congressional district of Northern Samar, Philippines. The research design employed descriptive research. The sample consisted of 388 junior high school students enrolled during the Academic Year 2019-2020.

The research findings revealed that while the learning community was moderately favorable, the social community was highly favorable. To sum up, the community environment was moderately favorable. It was also indicated that a communication task force should be instituted in schools. In the same manner, the schools should forge for sustainable school-students-community relations.

KEYWORDS: *community environment, communication, learning community, social community, junior high school students, school-students-community relations*

How to cite this paper: Veronica A. Piczon | Leah A. De Asis | Brenfred N. Romero "Communicating Community Environment of Junior High School Students in the First Congressional District of Northern Samar, Philippines: Inputs to School-Students-Community Relations" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-6 | Issue-2, February 2022, pp.580-587, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd49272.pdf



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1. INTRODUCTION

The environment has a pivotal role in the holistic growth and development of every individual. Indeed, the African proverb, “it takes a whole village to raise a child” remains relevant in this time and age. The success or failure of an individual mirrors the kind of community environment he/she is part of. A number of recent studies suggest that high levels of poverty within the community can adversely affect children's development regardless of the quality of the individual family environment. Brody, et al. (2001) studied the influence of neighborhood characteristics on 10- and 11-year-old African American children in Iowa and Georgia and found out that children who lived in disadvantaged communities, whether urban or rural, were more likely to affiliate with antisocial peers than were children living in more affluent

communities. Affiliating with antisocial peers had a negative effect on children's academic progress, even when those children came from nurturing, supportive families.

In this study, community environment refers to learning and social communities of junior high school students in a countryside of the Philippines. School learning environments are a matter of global policy and systemic government investment (Dumont & Istance, 2010). The strategic reconsideration of school learning spaces is a response to demographic, economic and technological changes that have altered the perceptions of what constitutes effective teaching and learning (MCEETYA, 2008; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2011; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014; OECD, 2013). In a learning

environment, usually, the teacher encodes different stimuli which are decoded by the learners using various strategies. As Ozerem and Akkoyunlu (2015) point it, there are some who try to learn by giving meaning to them at once, whereas others learn by repeating; and while few can remember what they learned easily and quickly.

On one hand, social environment includes family members, friends and colleagues, while physical environment is the size of the room, the ambient temperature or the availability of certain foods (Ojating, 2012). Eyo (2003) asserted that an individual is born into a social environment and it is only through interaction with that environment that he is able to develop a consciousness of self and affective characteristics. Hoffman, Hutchinson and Reiss (2009) conclude that positive social environment has been linked to enhancing students' behavior, academic achievement, and motivation. It also has a positive impact on the formation of students' attitudes and behaviors in many key areas like making decisions, equality and justice, caring, sensitivity, and discipline of a student

Despite the current interest and systemic investment in school learning environments, there is a lack of empirical data to adequately evaluate how existing and alternative learning environments (blended, ILEs and open) impact teaching and learning (Blackmore, Bateman, O'Mara, & Loughlin, 2011; Brooks, 2011; Gislason, 2010). This is where effective communication comes into play. It is through communication that the teachers and school officials would know the live experiences of their students as regards their community environment. With proper communication, wins can be celebrated, gaps will be bridged, and problems can be properly addressed. Dinu (2015) stressed that unavailability of teachers and poor communication by teachers are the major factors that have led students to abandon their study at a certain level. The essential part of good learning environment is that the students feel pleasant and comfortable (Asrar, Tariq, & Rashid, 2018).

The community is an essential partner of academic institutions. Thus, its participation in school operation can contribute to the success and well-being of school affairs including its administration, teaching faculty and staff, and students. Education is a 'social activity in which, in addition to the school, society plays the role of a facilitator and partner' (Sujatha, 2011: 201). The UNESCO believes that successful schools understand the importance of establishing good and harmonious relations with the community in which they lie.

This study is dedicated to its intent of identifying the landscape of the community environment of junior high school students in the first congressional district of Northern Samar, Philippines, particularly on their learning and social communities, wherefrom inputs for school-community relations can be drawn.

2. Objectives

The study sought to:

1. Determine the learning community of the junior high school students;
2. Determine the social community of the junior high school students; and
3. Draw out inputs to school-students-community relations.

3. Review of Literature Community Environment

Many studies have shown that family characteristics can significantly affect children's development and school achievement. Beyond the immediate family, however, how much does the larger community influence a young person's school success? This question has implications for education policy: If community characteristics are strongly associated with student achievement, then efforts to improve student performance must focus on the community as a whole, not just on the school.

Swanson (2004) examined how community poverty affected high school completion for different ethnic groups. He found that high school graduation rates for African American students were more adversely affected by high-poverty environments than were graduation rates of white or Asian American students. The graduation rate for African Americans in very high-poverty school districts averaged approximately 50 percent, the lowest graduation level observed among the racial and ethnic groups studied.

Shumow, Vandell, and Posner (1999) focused on how various community demographic characteristics affected the academic performance of students in the 3rd and 5th grades. Fifth grade students who lived in neighborhoods with lower average household incomes, lower adult education levels, more female-headed households, and more violent crime performed worse in school than did students who lived in neighborhoods with more socioeconomic resources and less crime. The 5th graders' academic performance correlated negatively with neighborhood risk even after controlling for demographic indicators of family risk, such as family income and employment status. This negative impact did not extend to the study's 3rd grade subjects, however. The researchers speculated that before students reached 5th grade, they spent more time in the home and had

less opportunity to be influenced by the larger community.

Baker, McGee, Mitchell, and Stiff (2000) studied how a variety of community characteristics—including average family poverty level, average education level of adults, family median income, and students' socioeconomic status—affected the standardized test scores of 8th graders across Virginia. Community education level and students' socioeconomic status were the strongest predictors of success on standardized tests. The researchers concluded, however, that all of the factors studied were interrelated and that programs to optimize education opportunities for economically disadvantaged youth must address more than these two factors. They recommended implementing a holistic approach to adequately address the complex variables at work in communities.

Learning Environment

Ozerem, A. and Akkoyunlu, B. (2015) examined primary students' and inspectors' opinions on different learning environments designed according to students' learning styles and its effects on students' achievement. The study found out that different learning environments designed for visual, auditory-kinesthetic learners have a positive effect on student grades. Sitholed (2017) intended to investigate the causes and consequences of a school's setting in promoting a positive learning environment and further discussed the benefit of positive learning environment in schools. It was revealed in the study that the students' success in their learning progress is determined by a positive learning and teaching environment.

Social Environment

Arifin, Wahab, Teh, and Otman (2018) conducted a study of social environment which Essentially, partnerships between districts, schools, and community organizations involve a mutual commitment of resources, services, and collaborative efforts to support a predefined need or goal, usually to the benefit of all involved parties (SAGE Publications). When schools and community organizations work together to support learning, everyone benefits. Partnerships can serve to strengthen, support, and even transform individual partners, resulting in improved program quality, more

efficient use of resources, and better alignment of goals and curricula (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010).

4. Methodology

A descriptive research design was used for the study. The population comprised all junior high school students enrolled during the Academic stems from a major belief that 'Social environment consists of the sum total of a society's beliefs, customs, practices and behaviors.' The article suggested a significant social learning theory based on Islamic and west perspective and effect of social environment on student behavior. Ojating (2012) investigated the causal relationships between some social environment variables, and their influence on students' interest in school in Southern Educational Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria which findings indicated that out of the four social environment variables (peer group influence, teacher – student relationship, parental academic stimulation and parental socio-economic status), three (3) contributed significantly to the prediction of the students' interest in school. Only parental socio-economic status did not contribute significantly to students' interest in school.

School-Students-Community Relations

A particular school can never be an island. Not an administrator alone can make the school go round. Thus, each school has to forge long lasting relationship with its internal environment, the teachers, staff, and students and develop strong partnership with the community. School–community partnerships can impact student success and post-school outcomes as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return (Gross, et al., 2015).

Year 2019-2020 in secondary (junior level) schools in the first congressional district of the Division of Northern Samar. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select 388 students.

A self-structured instrument was adapted from the study of Rovaia, Wightinga, and Lucking (2014) on The Classroom and School Community Inventory: Development, refinement, and validation of a self-report measure for educational research. The 17-item instrument has the subscales social community and learning community. It lets the respondents choose their degree of agreement by selecting from a five-point scale.

5. Results and Discussion

Learning Community

Table 1: Learning Community

Learning Community	WM	Interpretation
I am satisfied with my learning at this community.	4.20	Very highly favorable
I feel that this community gives me ample opportunities to learn.	3.80	Highly favorable
I feel that my peers in the community support my educational need.	3.40	Highly favorable
I share the educational values of my neighbors at this community.	2.75	Moderately favorable
I feel that this community satisfies my educational goals.	2.50	Less favorable
I feel that this community promotes a desire to learn.	2.31	Less favorable
Grand Mean	3.16	Moderately favorable

The learning community was found to be moderately favorable with a sub-mean of 3.10. It goes to show that students are satisfied with their learning at the community (4.20) and feel that the community gives them ample opportunities to learn (3.80). These data support the claim of Ozerem and Akkoyunlu (2015) that learning environment pertains to surroundings that make it possible for the learner to find solutions to their problems and to have access to the materials to help them achieve their goals. Most students also feel that their peers in the community support their educational need and share similar educational values (3.40). This finding is very important considering that close community relation has significant effect not only on educational goals of students but also on the holistic development of the child. Having a supportive community means that students will live with pride and without hesitations. These findings disconfirm the conclusion of Banagbanag (2015) that most environments are not that sympathetic to the students. The previous author concluded that the community is not a place where students can find other people who will help them academically.

It can be noted however, that the students were less favorable on the notions that their learning community satisfies their educational goals (2.50) and promotes a desire to learn (2.31). These findings go against the ideals of learning environment as mentioned in the study of Vinales (2015) that it is a key factor for student learning. It provides crucial exposure for the students and helps students develop their repertoire of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in order to meet 21st century competencies.

Social Community

Table 2: Social Community

Social Community	WM	Interpretation
I have friends at this community to whom I can tell anything.	4.48	Very highly favorable
I feel that I matter to other teenager at this community.	4.25	Very highly favorable
I feel close to others at this community.	4.19	Highly favorable
I feel connected to other teenagers in this community.	4.18	Highly favorable
I trust my friends in the neighborhood.	4.09	Highly favorable
I feel that I can rely on other teenagers at this community.	4.00	Highly favorable
I regularly talk to others at this community about personal matters.	3.88	Highly favorable
I feel confident that others in the community will support my education.	2.50	Less favorable
I feel that I am given ample opportunities to interact with the community.	2.40	Less favorable
I feel that I can rely on neighborhood in education.	2.17	Less favorable
Grand Mean	3.61	Highly favorable

In terms of social community, the sub-mean of 3.61 shows that students found it highly favorable. They have friends at this community to whom they can tell about their problems (4.48) and they feel that they matter to other teenagers in the community (4.25). This is very important so that students will not develop anxiety whenever they are with their neighbors. These data find support from the concept of Salawu (2003) on peer group as the group that an individual interacts and plays with within his/her immediate environment. He further argued that while

in the group he/she enjoys a free world, more indecent in thought and action and he/she has freedom to discuss matters of interest. Indeed, as stressed by Noraini (2005) friends also have a strong influence on the process of character formation and behavior of schoolchildren. This finding however disconfirms the conclusion of Banagbanag (2015) that most environments are not that supportive to the cause of the students. The previous author concluded that the community is not a place where students can easily express their problems.

It can also be deduced from the table that the students are less favorable on their confidence level that others in the community will support their education (2.50), that they are given ample opportunities to interact with the community; and on their reliance on their neighborhood education. The data go against the ideals set by Aldridge, Mcchesney, & Afari (2017) on social environment, as a powerful tool to shape the behavioural learning processes of an individual.

Willems and Gonzalez-DeHass (2012) described school–community partnerships as meaningful relationships with community members, organizations, and businesses that are committed to working cooperatively with a shared responsibility to advance the development of students’ intellectual, social, and emotional well-being. Hussein, Muturi, & Samantar (2018) conducted a study to investigate the influence of community involvement in school financing, motivating teachers, maintenance of school infrastructure of the schools on academic performance in Garowe City, Somalia. The study revealed that the community is not actively represented in the school management committees but it exists nominal like parents and teachers’ associations in which influence the students’ performance of schools.

School-Students-Community Relations

The data on this part of the current study are grounded on the less favorable findings in the community environment (learning and social communities) which draw inspiration from the literatures of Hanover Research (2019), particularly on the characteristics of strong school-community relations (Olson, 2018) and evidence-based practices for building school-community partnerships (Huffman, et al., 2014).

The schools need to institutionalize communication task force section which service deliverable delves on providing access to students to encourage open communication. It is through this mechanism that the internal and external issues and concerns of the students are brought up to the school administration and wherefrom matters can be acted upon. Sanchez & Guo (2005) stressed that communication is fundamental and vital to all administrative functions as it is a means of transmitting information and making oneself understood by another or others.

The students do not exactly feel that their respective communities satisfy their educational goals and promote their desire to learn. Thus, the school and the community should work with an unsullied commitment to putting students’ need first (focus on students). Both social structures should reexamine their respective strengths and weaknesses and deliver

a gamut of support to students in various capacities (leveraging of strengths). The school and community need to legitimize their partnership through a memorandum of agreement and an oversight committee should be organized to upkeep partnership monitoring (leadership and oversight) and ensure sustainable progress towards the fulfillment of shared goals (sustained duration). As partners, the school, the students, and the community are duty-bound to maintain two-way communication that is grounded on trust, transparency, and commitment (open communication). As pointed out by Campbell (2012) the task now confronting educational reformers and researchers is to refine the understanding of the characteristics of effective community involvement and of the related conditions in educational systems and communities under which such involvement has the most beneficial impact.

The students do not have the confidence that they are given ample opportunities to interact with the community and that they cannot rely so much on their neighborhood as regards their education. Considering that community involvement in schools is a critical component for student achievement (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010; Bryk, 2010; Coleman, 1988; McAlister, 2013; Sanders, 2006) it is high time for the inclusion of the community as school partner and together forge a commitment to enjoy equality between and among them. It is through this equality between school and the community where community members can be involved in policy decisions and that tailored-fit programs can be catered to them. Emphasizing relationship building augments practice of reciprocity which is essential in maximizing the potential of both sectors in expanding the learners’ support systems through the utilization of non-monetary support, i.e. counseling and health services, tutorial, and personality development, among others. As reiterated by Tondeur (2013), school-community partnership enables the school and the community to share the responsibility of running the schools and helping the child to achieve the aim of education without which neither the school nor the community can benefit.

6. Conclusions

The community environment, in terms of learning and social community of the junior high school students in the first congressional district in Northern Samar, Philippines was investigated in this study. Data revealed that generally, the community environment is moderately favorable. While the learning environment is moderately favorable, the social environment is highly favorable. It can be implied that although the students find the appetite of learning

from their respective communities, there is still a big room which needs further improvement – that they may be given ample opportunities to interact with the people in their community and rely on their neighbors to further their education.

Communication task force is an important component to achieve harmonious relationship between the school and the students. Its installation can lead to student empowerment as they are given a platform to voice out the issues and concerns confronting them by which intervention can be immediately provided by the school administration.

The school-students-community relations is very essential as it puts premium on the holistic growth and development of the students. It leverages collective strengths, develops servant leadership, sustainable partnerships, and nourishes open communication which can be beneficial to both, the school and the community which synergy can be attributed to optimum success of the students – being the core of the strong-willed partnership.

7. Recommendations

On the basis of the highlights of the study, the hereunder recommendations are set forth.

1. The learning community should provide scholarship programs and learning interventions which would upkeep the students' desire to achieve their educational goals.
2. Learning is not only achieved in school. Thus, it is recommended that social communities should provide learning spaces for students through volunteerism, tutorial, and interaction with the people in the community.
3. No school is an island. Hence, it is recommended that schools should develop and/or strengthen sustainable school-student-community relations.

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