

“Enabling Children Become Decision Makers Through Participation. Child Friendly Schools – PPTA and School Parliaments”

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Summary of the project

The participants who attended the international training programme: “Child rights, classroom and school management,” have introduced the child friendly program and the activity-based learning in 21 schools. Given that this is still an ongoing program, we selected ANMUP School Gokhale Nagar, among the 21 child friendly schools, as our target school and a target group composed of 176 pupils of Std. V, VI and VII. The objective of the project is to involve children in the planning and implementation of various activities in the school, thus in order to achieve this goal we implemented the programme through the Pupil, Parent and Teacher Association (PPTA).

The activities introduced through the PPTA are as follow:

- Orientation of pupils, teachers and parents.
- Creation of school parliament – pupils selecting their own representatives for the PPTA.
- Meetings of pupils’ representatives, parents, teachers and educational officers in order to plan programs and activities for the academic year. This has become the venue for raising problems and finding solutions.
- Inauguration of the PPTA.
- Formation of PPTAs under the leadership of teachers.
- Implementation of “My tree programme.” Every child has planted trees in his/her plot under the monitoring of the PPTA.
- Archery training given by qualified experts and the introduction of an Archery Club.
- Organic planting of vegetables in the pupils’ plot and school surroundings.
- “Plastic free” campaign to sensitize the community.
- Swimming training.

Challenges on the personal and professional levels

The challenges I have faced while setting up the programme include the juggling of my official work with the coordination of programs as well as the initial lack of confidence some of the stakeholders felt towards our ideas, although if this was later solved by spending more time orientating them in order to gain their collaboration.

We have experience not only challenges but also a lot of support from different sectors while setting up the project. Working at the district level, I count with the assistance from the department of education, teachers, colleagues and parents; this has been a great contribution to set out the program without difficulties. Most of the stakeholders are aware of child rights and they have welcomed us to introduce the program, this has given me the opportunity to interact with pupils, parents and teachers alike. Additionally, I have visited some of the pupils' homes and had the chance to monitor the development of the programme. We have not encountered any resistance to our programme; everybody has cooperated and has participated with us, making things to run smoothly. Furthermore, the members of the local government, representatives and other departments have visited the school and have offered their help.

Challenges on the organizational level

Some of the parents still want to show that they have more rights and freedom than the children and they believe that giving them too many liberties will trouble the discipline of the school; in the PPTA meetings, some of their attitudes hold back the children from speaking. The headmaster has to teach the children in his regular class and at the same time he has to deal with his official work, his absence from the school sometimes affects the efficiency of the programme. We also encounter difficulties when some of the female teachers have trouble visiting the pupils' homes after school hours. Another issue we have met is that while conducting meetings, the pupils' representatives decide individually without consulting the group.

While we faced some challenges at the organizational level, we also encountered that we had great advantages to start the project and we experienced a lot of positive results. Since ANMUP is small school with a staff of 10 teachers, they all worked as one unit. The headmaster, being a local man, had a greater role in the success of our project; his relationships with the local people, people's representatives and other officials assured the support we needed to carry out the activities. The teachers were able to visit people's homes after school hours and during holidays in order to establish good relationships with parents and pupils, thus building an environment open for interaction free of fear.

The PPTA meeting became the venue for raising problems and solving them, the people from the locality contributed with innovative ideas and worked very hard to implement them. For example, under the "My tree programme," pupils brought to school their own nurseries and seedlings and gave them to other children. Some of them drew pictures of trees, made poems, stories, riddles and wrote their own experience related to the "My tree programme." These materials were exhibited inside and outside the classrooms and on special occasions they were exhibited to the public.

These activities are interesting and challenging for the pupils because they all give them an individual role to perform, as a result, learning has become more interesting and they attend classes regularly. Another outcome of the programme is that parents visit schools more often and they monitor all the activities with the help of members from the local government, this has caused the children to reach an enhanced level of performance.

Challenges of social, cultural or religious nature

50% of the children enrolled in ANMUP School belong to tribes, mostly the Paniya Community, and their parents are illiterate; this is one of the reasons why their dropout rate is very high in the district. Since learning became more interesting and pupils are engaged in the new activities, the dropout rates have decreased. Nevertheless, since the parents are illiterate and not willing to cooperate; involving all children, especially tribal children, still represents a big challenge for us. The other half of the children, the ones that come from the very poor families, have to help their parents with the household work or looking after their younger siblings, affecting their attendance rate at school.