Perspectives Of Children's Parliament In Thiruvallur District, Tamil Nadu: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The objective of this exploratory study is to understand the various perspectives of children's parliament involved in the process of growth. The researcher used purposive sampling to collect data from 450 members of 30 children's parliaments (CP). Frequency tables and diagrams were adopted for the analysis of the data. Attachment of parents and children, relationship with peers and teachers were found to influence their growth. Through Venn diagram and social mappings, the children identified with misunderstandings and finance were the major sources of conflicts. Children's parliaments played a key role in their holistic development, namely, biological, personality, social, political, cultural, communitarian, ethical and ecological dimensions.

Keywords: Children's Parliament, Perspectives, Development, Activities.

Introduction

Currently, the United Nations estimates that about 1.2 billion adolescents (aged of 10-19 years) are in the world as a whole covering about 16 per cent of the world's population. Teenage children and young people are in awkward growth and developmental stages of their lives facing internal and external struggles on daily basis. Children go through hormonal and behavioural changes, social, political, school and peer group pressures, parental compulsion, violation of their feelings and views, puberty and teenage issues and so on. Over the centuries, many Child Rights

Organizations and Children Welfare Committees in the world as well as in India noticed that children themselves rarely get opportunities to share their opinions, thoughts and ideas, desires and feelings, likes and dislikes, and decisions on the things that are very essential and significant to their happiness, community involvement, growth, wellbeing and integrated holistic development.

Concept and Definition of Children Parliament

Thomas (2022) as a director and CEO of Holistic Child Development Organization (HCDO) in India defined CP as a group of children of a particular village, neighbourhood, or a region who come and live together as a group for children's activities, learning, representing their interests, views and opinions to the decision makers of the village.

CP activities focus on development and empowerment of children in the following multi-dimensional perspectives of their growth for a better future and happy generation of adults. They equip children with basic knowledge of CP, facilitate skill education, maintain sustainability of CP, teach about their rights, undertake activities that support better health and art of negotiation and group decision making, participation, help in the process of eradication of social evils, teach responsibility and demand duties with dignity.

Review of Literature

Bowlby & Ainsworth theorized with the biological perspective on children's growth and development. They gave the theory of attachment dealing with the attachment of children with their parents, peer groups, teachers and primary care givers. The significance of this theory is developing social, behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects in children which are the foundation of social learning in school. Harris (1998) said, "Nature gives parents a baby; the end result depends on how they nurture it. Good nurturing can make up for many natural mistakes; lack of nurturing can trash nature's best effort." Lynne et al. (2007) described that the psychological perspectives of children's growth and its consequences are seen at the time of puberty in both boys and girls. Teenage boys who mature earlier attain some social advantages such as being taller and stronger and so they become popular among the peers. At the same time, however, early-maturing boys are at a greater risk for delinquency, conflict with laws, and are likely to engage in antisocial behaviours, including drug or alcohol abuse, truancy, and precocious sexual habits or activity. Girls who mature early may find their maturity stressful and painful, particularly if they experience teasing or sexual harassment (Mendle et al. 2007). Pescovitz (2007) asserts that early-maturing girls are also more likely to have emotional issues and problems such as a lower self-image, and higher rates of depression, higher anxiety, and disordered eating than their peers (Ge et al., 1996).

Goldberg (2001) explained how cognitive development takes place as adolescents mature: the prefrontal cortex (brain area) develops for the functions such as reasoning, planning, decision making and problem solving. It also continues to develop into their early adulthood. At this age adolescent children act impulsively, rather than thoughtfully because emotional parts of the brain develop faster than prefrontal cortex (Blakemore, 2008). Furthermore, the hormonal surge and puberty together influence emotional responses, create stronger emotions and thus lead to impulsive behaviour. Therefore, children in their adolescent period may engage in risky behaviour, such as smoking, dangerous driving, drug abuse, and having unprotected sex, in part because they have not yet fully attained the mental capacity to control impulsive act or to create entirely rational judgments (Steinberg, 2007).

Studies done throughout the world consistently find, for example, Forde and Martin (2016) revealed that children and young people who are members of CPs, youth councils and clubs, benefit and take advantage personally in terms of confidence, leadership skills, self-esteem, and personal skills (Patrikios & Shephard, 2013). Joachim (2007) presented that East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific region that shape the context of child and youth participation depend on the regional economic situation, political system, social relationships including the gender relationships and attitudes, hierarchical and authoritarian relationship perspectives towards children and the nature of the educational system. Salazar (2005) described that human rights-based approach or perspective is possible within the process of modernization and urbanization of Asian societies to study the children in conflict with law, ethnic minority children and the children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS in Vietnam. He also stated that the hierarchical and authoritarian relationship between the State and Citizens is mirrored in the relationship between children and parents and between students and teachers. The born (1996) portrayed the different strands of public concerns regarding children in the course of the 20th century and the political perspectives and process and the ideological constellation which led up to the UN Convention and its political effects in North-western Europe. Galant & Parlevleit (2005) investigated on four ways in which rights operate – as rules, structures, relationships and processes – which mirror a sociological acceptance and understanding of rights.

Based on legal analysis and inclusive perspectives of the UNCRC, Parkes (2008) articulated the type of standards required for CPs such as an open, democratic and non-discriminatory or non-biased election process and inclusive approach of children from all levels of society. The author also focused on the priority of children's views; and recommendations from the parliaments should effect change and development leading to policy and law-making process. Kohlberg (1984) mentioned that children learn their moral value system and application of ethical principles through active thinking and reasoning, moral developmental stages – pre-

conventional, conventional and post conventional stages. He also claimed that moral behaviour is based on self-chosen ethical principles that are generally comprehensive and universal, such as justice, dignity, and equality. Jaffee & Hyde (2000) expressed that, adolescent girls and women tend to practice caring, helping, and connecting with others than do boys and men in their lifetime.

Materials and Methods

For this study, the researcher has adopted explorative research design and thereby, collected primary data from respondents who belonged to CPs. To this end, at first, the researcher selected (purposively) Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu, wherein the Bon Secours Social Service Society (BSSSS), an NGO has started as high as 45 CPs. From these, at the second stage, 30 CPs have been selected, as they fulfilled the inclusion criteria of 5 years of completion of their establishment, i.e., on or after 2011 to 2016. These 30 CPs are spread in five community development blocks of the district such as Gummidipoondi, Poonamallee, Thiruvallur, Kadambattur, and Sholavaram.

At the final stage, the researcher has selected 450 respondents (who are students of 8-12 standards and members of these CPs) by giving equal representation of 15 members per CP. However, as the size of them vary in the range of 15–23; all 15 members have been selected in the case of those CPs that have 15 members only, whereas simple purposive sampling technique is applied to select the members from other CPs that have 16-23 members. Data for this study has been collected from the selected respondents with self-prepared questionnaire (semi-structured). From this tool, information related to the basic socio-demographic profile of the respondents is obtained, followed by the sources to receive information and persons instrumental in making the respondents join CP and acquire perspectives of taking part or participating in it. All the data had been collected during August - September, 2021. The data was analysed in terms of frequency tables and diagrams (graphs) with the help of IBM-SPSS Version 20.0 software.

Result and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Children in Children Parliament

Sl. No.	Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Children		Percentage	Frequency
1)	**Age (in years)**	13 – 14	32.9	148
		15 – 16	49.1	221
		17 and Above	18.0	81
2)	**Gender**	Male	56.2	253
		Female	43.8	197

| Sl. No.	Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Children		Percentage	Frequency
3)	**Education**	8 – 9 Standards	33.6	151
		10 – 11 Standards	48.7	219
		12 Standard	17.8	80
4)	**Religion**	Hindu	67.6	304
		Muslim	10.7	48
		Christian	21.8	98
5)	**Place of Living**	Rural	72.7	327
		Urban	27.3	123
6)	**Type of Family**	Nuclear	87.1	392
		Joint	9.8	44
		Extended	3.1	14
7)	**Family Size**	3 – 4 Members	66.9	301
		5 & above	33.1	149
8)	**Type of House**	Thatched	8.7	39
		Tiles / Sheets	58.0	261
		Terraced	33.3	150
	Total		**100.0**	**450**

The socio-demographic details of the respondents (Table 1) highlight that boys are in majority (56%) than girls and half of the respondents (49%) are in the age group of 15-16 years, one-third of them (33%) are in the age group of 13-14 years while the remaining (18%) have completed 17 years and above. As schooling is closely connected with age, nearly half of the respondents (49%) are currently (at the time of data collection) studying in 10-11 standards, one-third of them are in 8-9 standards and the rest (18%) of them are in 12th standard. Majority of the respondents (70%) are studying in Tamil medium schools (local language commonly spoken and used by the people) and three-tenth of them (30%) are pursuing their studies in English medium schools, which are mostly affordable to the lower middle and upper middle-class people.

Regarding the religious upbringing of the respondents, majority of them are Hindus (67.6%), whereas slightly more than one-fifth of them (21.8%) are Christians and the rest are Muslims 10.7%. Majority of the respondents are from rural background (73%) and the rest (27%) are from urban neighbourhood. It is conspicuous to note that a greater percentage of the respondents (87%) are part of nuclear families, whereas about one-tenth of them (10%) belonged to joint families and only a few (3%) of them are from extended families. Looking into the type of respondent's houses, which mirrors indirectly the economic status and/or poverty level, it is eye-catching to note that majority of the respondents dwell in

houses that have tiled roof / asbestos sheets (indicating lower economic status) and around 9 per cent inhabit in houses that have thatched roof, who are said to be living under poverty.

Different Perspectives of Children's Parliament

Figure 1: Biological / Environmental Elements Influencing Children in CP
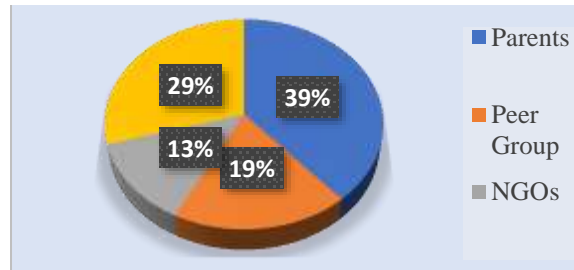
From the data demonstrated in Figure 1, it is clear that many factors influenced the respondents to join CP. Nearly two-fifth of them (39%) stated that they have been inspired by their parents to join, while three-tenth of them (29%) reported that they have joined such parliaments with the help of local leaders such as panchayat presidents or members / ward councillors.

On the other hand, about a less than one-fifth of the respondents 19% and 13% per cent of the respondents have been persuaded and influenced by the instigation of members of the peer group and NGOs, respectively, to join. All these figures specify that parents and local leaders at village / ward level play a vital role in influencing and convincing the children to join.

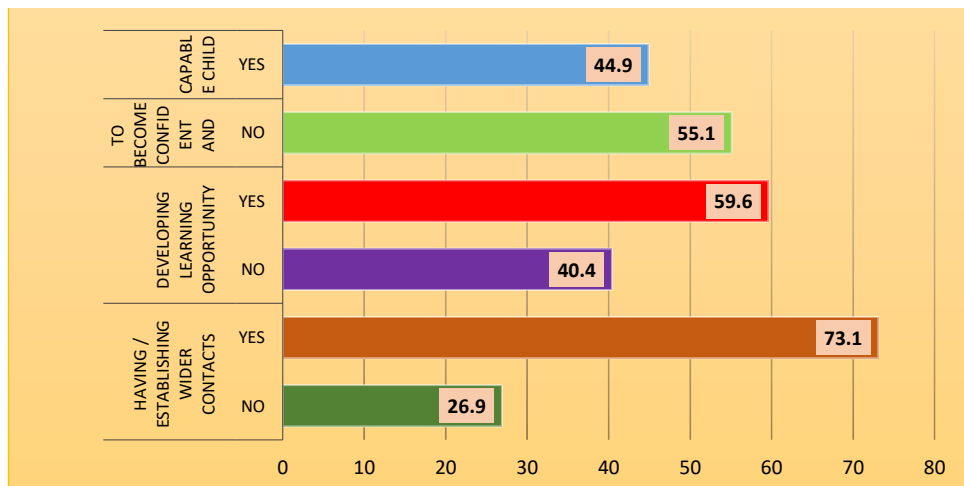**Figure 2: Biological / Parental Perspectives to Permit Children in Joining CP**

Figure 2 depicts the distribution of the biological parental influence and motivation for permitting their children to join CP of the three major reasons under study. Nearly three-fourth of the respondents (73.1%) reported that 'having / establishing wider contacts is the pivotal reason perceived by their parents so as to influence their children to join. Closely followed by participating in such parliament will 'develop learning opportunity to their children' (59.6%).

A little less than one-third of the respondents (26.9%) stated that 'children would become confident and capable of doing day-to-day things in a meticulous manner' as one of the reasons perceived by their parents to give their consent to join CP.

Fairly good percentage (44.9%) of the parents felt that their children are capable ones. Whereas, 55.1 percentage of the parents felt that their children would not be capable of performing well in CP. It is surprising that 40.4 percentage of the parents were of the opinion that CP would not provide their children with the capacity to develop leadership quality in any way.

Conflict Perspectives of Children Parliament

Figure 3: Causes of Conflicts among the Respondents in CP
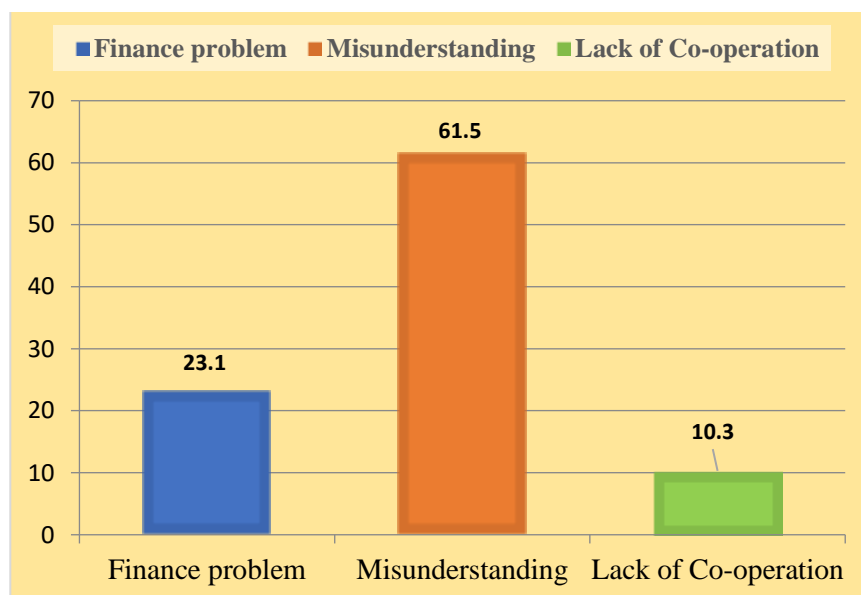
From the collected data of this research work, figure 3 presents the distribution of the causes of conflicts among the respondents in CP. Majority of the students, that is 61.5 per cent, have identified misunderstanding as the primary reason for the conflicts in CPs and 23.1 per cent of the respondents have agreed that financial problem as a the cause, while 10.3 per cent of them felt that lack of corporation among children as well as elders as a the minor reason for the conflicts.
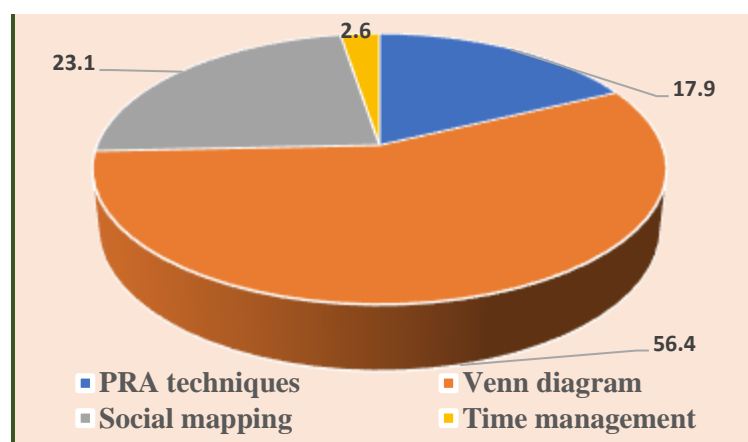
Figure 4: Methods of Identifying Problems / Conflicts

Figure 4 describes the distribution of the methods of identifying problems or conflicts within CPs. The information reveals that 56.4 per cent of the respondents use Venn diagram and 23.1 per cent of the students use Social Mapping method to identify the issues and thus they are enabled to solve their own problems through the process of democratic and decision-making process in a peaceful manner. While PRA Techniques are used by some of the students, that is 17.9 per cent, just about 2.6 per cent of them used time management strategy to identify their conflicts of CP as well as their own surroundings.

BSSSS – NGO's Perspectives on the Development of Children

Table 2: Influence and Importance of BSSS NGO in the Development and Growth of Children in Children Parliament Activities

Sl. No.	Importance	Percentage	Influence	Percentage
1.	In a little way	30.8	Normal	20.5
2.	Fairly	59.0	Satisfactory	74.4
3.	Impressively	10.3	Substantial	5.1
	Total	**100**	**Total**	**100**

The distribution of BSSSS influence and importance in the development and growth of children who are involved in CP activities at present as well as in their future. BSSS's role and activities conducted in CP are important to the respondents fairly are 59 per cent and 30.8 per cent of the respondents were significant only in a little way while 10.3 per cent of them were impressively done.

Considering the influence of the activities of the NGO for the developmental works for the children, majority, that is 74.4 per cent of

the students were satisfied and 20.5 per cent of them felt that they are normal while only 5.1 per cent of them felt that their activities were substantially influencing them for their growth.

Social and Democratic Perspectives of Children Parliament

Figure 5: Distribution by the Social and Democratic Values of CP
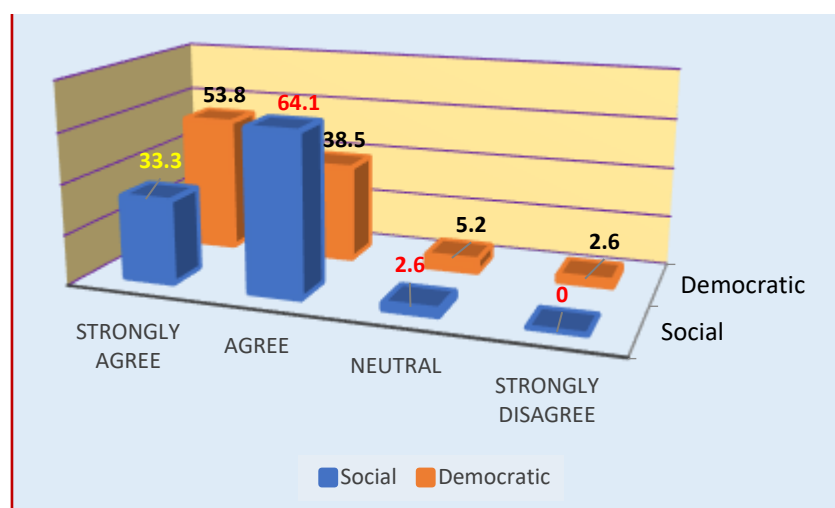

Figure 5 explains the distribution of the respondents' social and democratic perspectives of learning social and democratic values through CP in Thiruvallur district.

Some of the social values that are being practiced and realized in BSSSS CPs are happiness, patriotism, respect for human dignity, rationality, sacrifice, individuality, equality and democracy and so on.

With reference to social values, 33.3 per cent strongly agreed and a large majority of 64.1 per cent agreed to have learnt them in CPs. It is to be noted that 5.2 per cent remained neutral while 2.6 strongly disagreed with this type of learning.

Some of the democratic values that are learned in the CPs are nationalism, liberty, and secularism, faith in democracy, fraternity, social justice and tolerance.

In the same diagram, as per the democratic values, it is clear that 53.8 per cent strongly agree for having learned them while 38.5 per cent just agree. It is evident that 5.2 per cent remained neutral to this perspective of child development while 0 percent had no strong disagreement.

Suggestions and Recommendations

❖ Parents, relatives, and school teachers need to be taught child developmental stages of growth and theories so that they may assist children to have holistic and integrated developmental

perspectives, having proper attachment or relationships with peer groups and opposite genders in life.

❖ Civil rights societies and NGOs should focus on the rights of children being made visible to the children, peer groups, students, and their parents such as the right to their views, expression, freedom, education, decision making, privacy, relationships etc.

❖ School management and educational government departments need to see that 75 per cent of the children being part of the CP have a rightful practice on social, personal, democratic, and spiritual value systems and the freedom to practice them irrespective of color, creed, and caste.

❖ Elders, leaders, and mentors of children in adolescence stage need to be vigilant to see that every child under their care builds a healthy childhood, positive personality, correct psychosocial and psychosexual orientations.

❖ All CPs and school departments need to organize personality awareness camps and activities, leadership programs, and outings to learn how to organize CPs and to eradicate social evils in the society.

Conclusion

Children's parliaments are very significant means and ways of helping children to have healthy and positive personality, dignity, and better growth in all aspects of life. They mould, build and influence the way children behave, think, act and perceive in their life for better childhood, future generation and healthy adulthood. NGOs, educational departments, civil right organizations, Cps, school managements etc… need to coordinate and collaborate with everyone to build a better as well as happy childhood, teen age experiences in order to build a better nation and future generation reducing marginalization, exploitations, crime rates, poverty, corrupted politics, and human right violations.

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