




*Research Paper*

## School for Children: A Phenomenological Study

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### Abstract

**Aim:** Recent years have witnessed an increased emphasis on the need for stakeholders' participation in the design of school environments. This descriptive phenomenological study used stratified sampling to analyze the perception of the third to sixth grade students of four schools. To this end, an essay was assigned to the students who were asked to complete the unfinished sentence "I would like to study in a school that ...". Data were analyzed using Colaizzi strategy. In order to increase the dependability, verifiability, reliability and accuracy of the data, the methods of "inspection and review at the time of coding", "using the opinions of research colleagues and verifying them", "explaining the exact details of the data collection and analysis process", "long-term engagement", triangulation and negative case analysis were used. The findings indicated that the majority of students were dissatisfied with the current state of schools, that is, schools did not provide them with a pleasant environment. Hence, the results of this study can be effective in making schools more pleasant.

**Keywords:** *Desired school, Children's participation, Phenomenology, Characteristics of the ideal school, Participatory design.*

### Introduction

Children's co-operation with the adoption of child rights laws and the centralization of their citizenship rights has been the focus of urban designers and planners since the 1980s. (Ezatian, 2017). As the society moves toward supporting children's well-being, it is important to use a more

participatory process to make direct use of children's opinions (Yarosh et al., 2017).

The approach of children's participation in urban space allows children to be effective and involved in planning and designing their living environment (Habibi et al., 2018). Meanwhile, designing schools as an important institution in educating the next generation is of a special significance (Khosravi et al., 2019). Each person spends about one-fifth of their life (Saeedi, Samin Sharifi and Babaei, 2018) in educational settings, which have a significant impact on their creativity (Dehghansanj and Reyhani Arani , 2017). Furthermore, participatory projects (yard design) of the school are useful for children 's sense of empowerment, ownership and learning (Kreutz et al., 2021).

Although the need for students' participation in the design of the environment has been studied to some extent, these studies have focused on architecture and urbanization. Despite the importance of the educational environment and students' participation in schools, to our knowledge, no semantic study has been conducted on students' perceptions and lived experience about their ideal school.

The lack of studies in this section motivated us to turn to research aimed at understanding the expectations of students from their ideal school so that designers and educators who are not aware of students' perspective can be informed so through the findings of this study. The realization of an ideal school environment can help students be more motivated. Therefore, the main research question is what the criteria for an ideal school are from students' point of view.

## **Methodology**

Since we sought to discover, describe and explain the data without applying personal inferences, we used the qualitative approach of a descriptive phenomenological method. Elementary schools of Mazandaran Province, Iran were selected for this research. Purposeful stratified sampling was used to obtain the opinions of the third to sixth graders. In order to increase the validity of the research, we observed the following: "four different grades of elementary school students who were able to write essays", "structured schools" ,"maximum diversity in terms of gender and grade", "schools with from different geographical areas", "getting help from two teachers in the process of conducting research and preparing a research report" and "examining students' essays after data saturation attention to the specific and unique content mentioned in student essays.

Since interviewing students was difficult and time consuming, we used writing technique to collect the data. We asked the students to write a creative essay given that the most complex and the best manifestation of

human's thought is creative thinking. (Rahmani Zahed et al., 2018). They were asked to start their essay with "The best school I would like to study at is a school that ..." or "ideal school' or topics with these themes at the discretion of the teacher in the class.

Data were analyzed manually using Colaizzi's seven-step strategy (1978): "familiarity with data, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, development of a comprehensive description, preparation of basic structure, and validation of basic structure." (Morrow, Rodriguez and King, 2015). Data analysis continued until the theoretical saturation of data, which occurred with 90 essays out of 164 (Excluding obscure deleted essays or missing significant new statements that were left out).

## Results

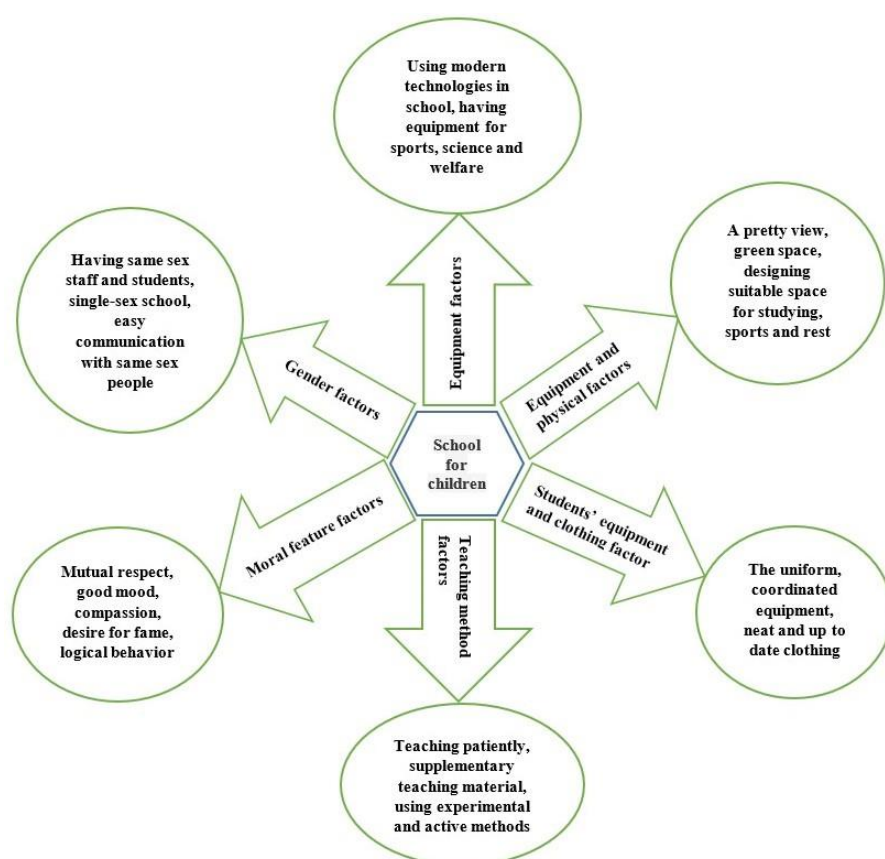
Consecutive examination of the views and comparisons of students' essays led to the identification of six main themes, the first of which was the equipment and physical space. Students wanted a beautiful place such as the sea or the forest. The yard was also very important to them, but the demands of the children in the village's multi-grade schools were not so great, and they just wanted the yard floor to be paved, the classroom to be painted, and so on, and they expected a school with basic facilities for playing and studying.

The second theme pertained to school equipment. School students who were familiar with modern technology wanted a smart school in which each class has its own computer and audiovisual system, each student has a computer, and the entry and exit of students is also done intelligently. However, students in the village, who were far from technology, wanted whiteboards so that they would not need to wash their clothes every day because of chalk dust.

in the context of gender, as the students get older, the more they wanted their single sex classmates and staff, and the reason was usually on the one hand in being freer in school in terms of dress and hijab and on the other hand in the ease of communication with the person They mentioned single sex.

Students' demands regarding the moral characteristics of school staff and other students were categorized as the fourth theme: "kindness", "playing and interacting with students", "rational behavior", and "observance of cleanliness". Rural school students, despite their small population, complained about the bad temper of teachers and other students, which may be partly due to the lack of proper education and culture in rural areas.

Students also considered the test and teaching method and asked for active teaching methods along with consecutive and leveled tests for different students, and in the field of clothing, they expressed the clothes of repetitive and simple form. They were dissatisfied and demanded better clothes and demanded better clothes. Of course, rural students only mentioned the neatness and orderliness of the students' clothes and as in the previous themes, they had demands that could be easily achieved with proper management.



## Discussion and conclusion

The codes in the sections: 'Equipment, gender of students and factors, moral characteristics, equipment and clothing of students and methods of teaching and learning' indicate the existence of a gap in each of these areas. Psychology and educational sciences to be a beacon for the studies of future researchers.

Identifying and reviewing solutions to improve the current situation requires further research. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide a basis for improving the atmosphere of schools, kindergartens and other educational environments and moving in the direction of student-centered schools and enlivening educational spaces. It is suggested that the findings of this study and similar studies be provided to teachers, administrators and designers of educational environments to benefit from the parts that are appropriate to the environment and their conditions in order to improve the educational environment.

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