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off, they could afford to take expensive tuitions and hence did well in school. Some students also said that because of this rich students tended not to pay attention in class because they already knew what was being taught. Consequently, they ended up disturbing the rest of the class.

* A quarter of the male students said that they had problems at home which affected their classroom learning. In the case of female students, 16 per cent gave the same response.

* Asked if their classroom learning was being influenced by external issues like the war in Iraq or Pakistan not doing well at the Cricket world cup, half the female students said 'yes'. In the case of male students, this proportion was a



much lower 15 per cent.

* Students were also asked whether the immediate physical environment affected how they did in class. This had to do with ventilation, lighting and whether it was too hot or cold inside class. Thirty per cent of the boys said it did compared to 45 per cent of the girls.

* As many boys as girls — 35 per cent each — said that they took tuitions. Asked if their parents could afford to provide tuition 24 per cent of the boys said 'yes' as did 36 per cent of the girls. The point to note here is that 10 per cent of all parents provide tuitions to their children with much financial difficulty and that the children were aware of this fact.

* Forty per cent of the boys and 20 per cent of the girls said that their learning would suffer if their mother were to work.

* The last question was related to school and classroom bullies. Thirty-five per cent of the boys and 30 per cent of the girls said that their studies were affected by bullying. This is a much-overlooked problem in Pakistan.

We admit that a few more important questions should have been asked, especially one that relates to the role of parents and their participation in school meetings. The scope of this survey is also limited by the fact that it was carried out in an urban area.

Conclusions: It should be clear to everyone that social and economic conditions can have a major influence on classroom learning.

Some of the factors behind the negative effects can be resolved by attention at the community level. A mechanism must be available in schools to address issues related to social attitudes that discourage learning. Such a mechanism should be equipped to eliminate these kind of attitudes, or at least be able to neutralize their more negative effects. To achieve this, educationists and policymakers must come forward and work for a healthy change in classroom learning.

We cannot change our social and economic conditions overnight. However, what we can do is to adopt the following, to minimize the damage to the whole process of classroom learning. 1. Each school should have a full-time student counselor. He or she should listen to the problems and grievances of the students and be qualified to give them proper advice. Intervention and preventive services should also be provided, especially to children in extreme distress.

2. Parents should be actively involved in the learning process of the child. It is vital that this should not be done in a piecemeal or ad hoc fashion but on a permanent footing. It should be made mandatory for them to attend parent-teacher meetings. This is key in identifying the causes to many of the problems that students, and might be helpful in resolving the conflicts arising out of such problems.

3. Parents should be involved to develop a common fund. The purpose of this fund should be to monetarily assist those children who cannot carry on their studies because of financial constraints. Parents should be told that they have an interest in this kind of arrangement because one day they too might be able to benefit from it.

4. Classroom learning should also incorporate the non-class interests of a child. Also included should be practical knowledge, especially that which can be used by students to get jobs in the local market once they become old enough. This can boost student confidence and raise self-esteem, thereby increasing their performance in class. ■

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