Chapter 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.0.0 Introduction

The present study sought to pursue two distinct approaches
to answer the research questions it started out with. The first ap-
proach was a quantitative nomothetic one which, as was presented in
chapter 5, culminated in evolving an empirically verified model of
causal relationships. The second approach sought to take up an
idiographic perspective and resulted in a qualitative description of
the classroom processes and case studies of the home backgrounds of
a few selected children from the sample. These were presented in
chapter 6. What have these two distinct approaches which were
adopted to seek empirical answers to research questions underlying
the present study, yielded in the direction of raising one's under-
standing of the whole phenomenon of child in transition to a higher
and more meaningful plane? To answer this, one needs to tie up the
loose ends which were left by the quantitative and qualitative ap-
proaches described in earlier chapters. This is precisely the role
of the present chapter.

7.1.0 The concern of the present study

The concern of the present study was to understand the child
in transition – the child as she graduates out of the cosy and
secure environments of home and pre-school to a relatively struc-
tured and unfamiliar ethos of formal school. The demands that school
makes from her and the response she makes to those demands, with all

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her developmental characteristics and the support she gets from her family and its social-environmental context, were all concerns of the present study. The theoretical systems of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner and Benjamin Bloom provided a perspective in which to view the developing child and her social-psychological context. Examining the related research studies in this perspective brought to light several gaps and lacunae, substantive and methodological, in the path towards constructing a wholistic view of the child in transition.

Responding to these gaps and lacunae, the present study restricted its scope to, probing into the phenomenon of entry into formal school within the localised context of a lower middle class urban Indian child. The study was initiated by formulating in precise terms the research questions it sought to answer, and they were the following:

1.   What are the specific causal relationships that exist between home environment, personality characteristics and school performance of urban, lower middle class Indian children of first standard?

2.   What are the relevant processes and interactions in the social-environmental context of the first standard urban child of the lower middle class which influence her response to the demands made by her entry into formal school?

3.   How do the various human and physical elements in the urban, lower middle class home environment influence the first standard child's performance at school?

7.2.0 The sample

The sample for the present study comprised fifty-six children (fifteen girls and forty-one boys) who constituted the standard one of a school predominantly catering to the educational needs of the lower middle class children, in one of the growing industrial metropolises of India, Vadodara.

7.3.0 Methodology

The answer to research question 1 was pursued through a quantitative nomothetic approach, while the research questions 2 and 3 were sought to be answered through a qualitative idiographic approach. The answer of these questions together, it was expected, would build a comprehensive wholistic picture of the child in transition.

7.3.1 Quantitative approach - Establishing causal relationships:

The first research question sought to establish specific causal relationships between home environment, personality characteristics and school performance of first standard children. The specific parameters were then identified in terms of the home environment and the background factors which influence it, developmental characteristics of the child and her school performance. They were: 1. Mother's Education (ME), 2. Gender of the child (G), 3. Educational Environment at Home (EEH), 4. Home Interaction Pattern (HIP), 5. Cognitive Development (CD), 6. Social Competence (SC), 7. Adjustment ot School (AS), and 8. Academic Achievement (AA).

The possible causal relationships that exist between these variables were examined, logically as well as in the light of earlier research findings and a causal model was hypothesised. This was

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further converted into a hypothetical path model as depicted in figure 7.1.

Suitable measuring instruments were adopted, adapted or developed for arriving at quantitative measures for each of these variables. The major instruments used were:

1.   The Educational Environment at Home: A Scale;

2.   The Home Interaction Pattern Scale;

3.   The Piagetian Cognitive Developmental Tasks;

4.   The Social Competence Scale; and

5.   Behavioural Adjustment to School: An Inventory.

For measuring Academic Achievement a deliberate decision was made not to go for standardised achievement tests. Instead, teacher-made tests were made use of. This decision was taken since academic achievement as a variable in the hypothesised causal model represented more the conformity of the child to the academic expectation of the given school milieu, and less an indicator of the scholastic abilities of the child defined in absolute terms.

Information for each of these instruments were collected using structured interviews of parents and the teacher, clinical interviews of the children and examination of school records.

The data thus collected were processed and were converted to z scores. The z score distributions were then , analysed to derive their inter-correlations. Further, the path coefficient corresponding to each path in the hypothetical path model was estimated using standard procedures, that is by computing the corresponding partial
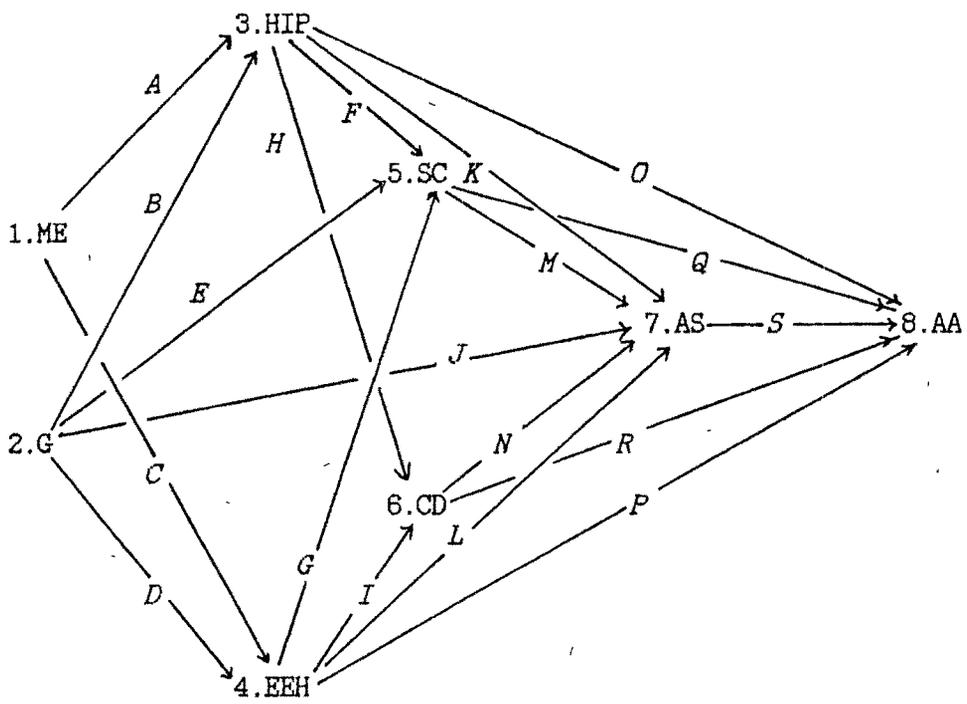
FIGURE 7.1: Hypothesised path model

regression coefficient (beta weight). The standard error for each beta weight was computed and its 0.95 confidence interval determined. On this basis, those path coefficient estimates which were significantly greater (or lesser) than zero were then identified as significant. The paths whose path coefficients were significant were retained in the tested and trimmed path model and the others were eliminated. The tested and trimmed path model is presented in figure 7.2.

7.3.2   The qualitative approach:

The second and third research questions were sought to be answered through an idiographic approach of compiling qualitative data pertaining to the classroom processes and the home background of six selected children. The classroom processes were recorded in detail without using any structured observation schedule. Classroom incidents as they occurred were faithfully recorded using anecdotal recording technique. The six children were selected on the basis of their school performance; three of them were high achievers and three low. Three of them were boys and three girls. Unstructured interviews were conducted with these children, and through a series of home visits, with the significant elders in the family and neighbourhood of each child, case study reports were prepared for each of these six children.

7.4.0   Discussion

How did the quantitative and qualitative approaches taken up in the present study answer the research questions posed at the very beginning? And, how did answers to these questions corroborate with one another to describe a meaningful and internally consistent picture of the subject of the present study - the child in transition, the standard one child?
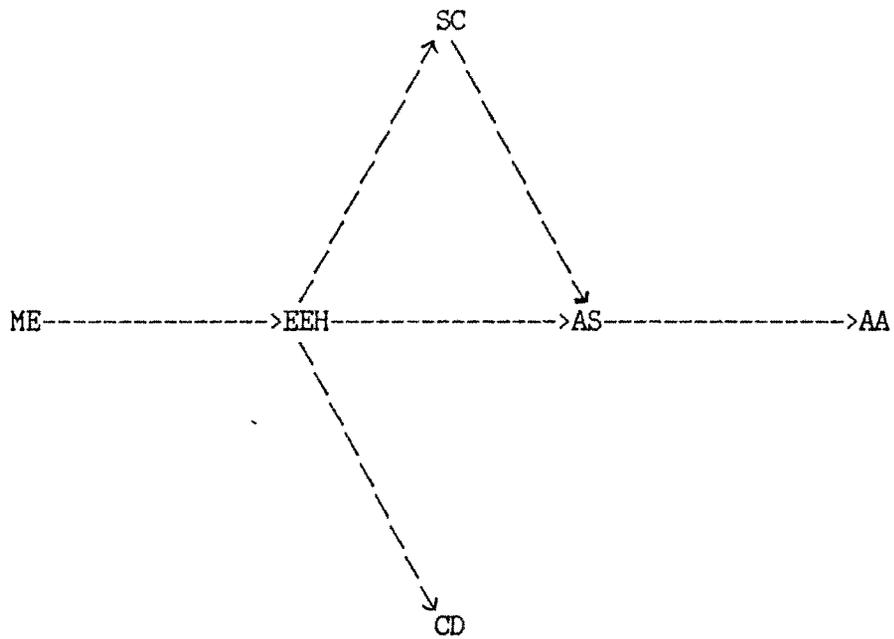
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FIGURE 7.2: Empirically tested and trimmed path model

Answering the first research question, the quantitative part of the study yielded the tested and trimmed path model which indicated three distinct paths of causal relationships:

1.   Mother's Education ---> Educational Environment at Home ---> Social Competence ---> Adjustment to School ---> Academic Achievement;

2.   Mother's Education ---> Educational Environment at Home ---> Adjustment to School ---> Academic Achievement; and

3.   Mother's Education ---> Educational Environment at Home ---> Cognitive Development.

There are three major features of the phenomenon one can gather on the basis of these causal paths that have emerged. One is the significance of Educational Environment at Home as an `anchor` variable. This variable seems to directly influence the developmental characteristics of the child, viz., Social Competence and Cognitive Development. Further, it also directly influences the child's Adjustment to School. Home Interaction Pattern though highly correlated with the Educational Environment at Home, ultimately gets eliminated from the path model.

The second feature is the emergence of Mother's Education as the most important exogenous variable directly influencing the Educational Environment at Home. Gender of the child does not seem to be a significant causal factor in the entire path model.

A third feature of the phenomenon one notices is the emergence of Social Competence as opposed to Cognitive Development as the developmental variable mediating between home environment and school performance. This also indirectly establishes the

predominantly 'social' (as opposed to 'cognitive') content of the academic performance demanded. by the school situation under study here.

Answering the second and third research questions, the qualitative part of the present study reveals the following major tendencies. The parental personality seems to be one major human element in the family which determines to a large extent the child's pace of unfolding her developmental characteristics and in turn her performance at school. Tension-free, relaxed and contended elders in the family working in unison seem to bring out the best in the child. Definite routines, systems, rules and code of conduct and a certain amount of strictures in following them seem to help the child adjust to the demands of the school. Time and inclination on the part of the parents to interact with the child seem to be crucial factors. Tension, lack of consistency and mutual concord and other preoccupations of the parents seem to effect regression, rebellion and stubbornness among children. Although study and play material have their importance, they are not the most important factors. The most significant factor influencing the child's performance at school is the parental care and time to interact meaningfully with the children.

The quantitative part of the study does not examine support systems in the family other than the mother. Therefore, it shows Mother's Education to be the crucial exogenous variable in the path model. The qualitative part of the study on the other hand shows the significance of father's and grand parents' roles, in addition to the mother's role in the child's nurture. Both qualitative and quantitative parts of the study show how crucial Educational Environment at Home is. But, while through the qualitative approach, home interactions emerged as important influencing factors, in the quantitative approach they seem to get eliminated,. The qualitative approach further reveals the limitation of taking up standard parameters for facilities at home by highlighting the variations the human elements

and interactions can make even within same or similar physical parameters.

Yet another incongruence between the findings generalised by the quantiative and qualitative parts of the present study is regardung the Gender of the child. Whereas the quantitative part of the study shows no gender differnce in the pattern of causal relationships, the qualitative part of the study reveals subtle, or sometimes not so subtle ways in which families discriminate between male and female child in their support to his/her schooling.

A tendency that both quantitative and qualitative parts of the study reveal is the essentially `social' content of the academic expectations of the school. Academic Achievement involved ability on the part of the child to reproduce textbook content orally or in writing. Although this presumes the child's ability to memorize, it also calls for a great deal of social skills as well. Ability to orally express to the teacher requires a certain amount of social competence on the part of a first standard child. Similarly, neatness and concentration while writing as well as comprehension of the teacher's commands seem to help the student more than even her cognitive abilities, to perform well in the school achievement test.

7.5.0   Implications for further research

The present study attempts to achieve a balanced blend of qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, this should be taken just as the essential first step towards constructing a wholistic reality about the child in transition from home to school. This study reveals the possibility of further steps both in the quantitative and the qualitative directions.

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The quantitative part of the present study generates an empirically verified and trimmed path model of causal links among selected variables. The present attempt was focused on a sample of limited size. One could articulate the trimmed path model further and empirically verify it on a larger sample to derive stable indicators of causal relationships.

Child is an evolving phenomenon. Certain tendencies revealed in the present study therefore will get consolidated and certain others altered as the child progresses through her schooling. A multi cross-sectional survey and a path analysis on its basis will be greatly useful in understanding the child as a growing entity a little better.

The qualitative part of the study can perhaps be followed up with more intensive observation and interviews making greater use of phenomenological and ethnological approaches. Also, on the basis of case studies attempted here, more elements from the home environment like the father's or grand parents' support, parental personality or neighbourhood support could be brought to greater scrutiny in the future studies. Similarly, certain crucial processes and interactions at home could be analysed in greater details in such studies.