CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In educational practice there is a general belief that a manipulation of the learning environments of children, specially of disadvantaged children, will be associated with sizeable increments in measures of cognitive and affective characteristics. Before accepting such a general notion as true, it is necessary to investigate as to what are the important environmental factors that affect education of children and then to see where, how much, and in what direction changes are really necessary to bring about optimum results of the educational processes.

All the activities in a school are expected to be so geared as to bring about an all-round development of its students. However, the lion's share of the school's attention is directed at developing the academic or intellectual aspect only. Despite this preponderant concentration of the school's effort, all its students are never equally benefited. A part of the cause of this inequality in academic attainment can perhaps be ascribed to difference in innate endowments and another part to various environmental factors. Every student has around him a different set of environmental factors that constantly influence him.

If one starts listing items under the head 'environmental factors', the catalogue might as well be interminable. The present
study aims at finding out the most important environmental factors that have a bearing on education and suggesting ways and means to improve these factors. The total spectrum of environmental factors being very vast, only a limited part thereof is chosen for the purpose of the present study. The factors included here in this study belong broadly to two groups - one relating to the school and the other relating to home, neighbourhood and other such out-of-school influences. The details of these two groups of factors are discussed in appropriate places.

There are certain aspects in the environment that seem quite innocuous in appearance but are in reality extremely harmful for the growing children. Often the teachers and parents remain blissfully ignorant of the quiet operation of such factors until considerable damage is done and effects become obvious. The saying goes that the wheel that does the squeaking is the wheel that gets the grease. While dealing with growing boys and girls it is advisable not to wait until the 'wheel' squeaks, it is better to apply 'grease' in time to prevent possible squeaking in the future.

Along with many other factors relating to school, one that the investigator would specially like to go into in some detail is the social climate that prevails in every classroom. A proper appreciation of the social climate of a class room and how it is supposed to be related with academic attainment are, therefore, matters of basic importance.

In a classroom every student has some idea about every other student in regard to various personality traits and these traits,
directly or indirectly, reflect the social, educational and cultural background from which the students come. It is on the basis of such ideas that forces of attraction and repulsion among the students come into play. Every student's academic achievement is supposed to be influenced in some way by other students' ideas about him, or in other words, academic achievement is believed to be a function of the student's degree of acceptance by others in the group. Thus acceptability, itself depending upon many other factors, can be considered to be an important environmental factor having a bearing on education. Students can perhaps learn better when all others in the classroom are friendly and co-operating than when they are antagonistic and hostile. Thus the social climate of the classroom constitutes one major environmental factor that affects education.

Man is a gregarious animal. When alone, he goes out to seek company and when in the company of many, he chooses companion and he is usually quite fastidious about his selection. Consideration of taste, temperament, attitude etc. play a vital role in selecting friends.

In a classroom, a certain number of students sit together, work together and, in fact, do everything together as a group. At the lower-most class of a Secondary school, the students coming from different primary schools and having no pre-established relationships among them are admitted and put together in different sections. Initially the students are quite unfamiliar to one another but then not for long do they remain as unfamiliar
individuals. They start interacting with one another fairly quickly and form a well-knit group. Physical proximity provides the necessary condition for the emergence of familiarity within the group. In a higher class of the secondary school we get students most of whom have already been together for years since their entrance into the high school along with some who have joined them at a later stage by way of transfer from other schools or by failing to get promotion to the next higher class. All these form the group.

On entering into any classroom one finds a lot of individual differences among the students in regard to their physical features: some are tall and some are short, some are thin and some are bulky, some are fair and some are dark-complexioned and so on. These differences are apparent and hence meet the eye easily. There are, however, other individual differences, in the realm of the minds, that are not at-once evident to a casual visitor. In fact, among the students there are a lot of differences, physical and others, and yet at the same time a lot of similarities.

In the classroom the students who are more or less of the same chronological age are exposed to the same school environment and, as such, they tend to acquire similar, though not same, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations and the like. In the school they share similar experiences, although it must be admitted that inspite of exposure to the same environment, different elements of the same environment may influence different individuals entirely differently. Further, the students come from different socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds and they possess varying degrees of basic
endowments such as intelligence. On the whole these similarities and differences act like a sort of cement that holds the individuals together. Among the individuals there are feelings of affection and aversion, attraction and repulsion, cooperation and competition and preference and avoidance. Based on these factors each group shows a characteristic friendship pattern. In such a friendship pattern there may be a few who are very much liked by many of their companions, some who form a small and very exclusive subgroup and perhaps a few who are most neglected or even rejected. The individual members in different groups may reveal different types of inter-personal relationships and as a consequence different kinds of social climates result in different classrooms.

Inter-personal relationships among the students in a classroom play a vital role in the development of the individual students. Individuals in the group can fully develop in academic and other spheres only in interaction with their fellows. To a large extent, the happiness and growth of each individual student depend on the sense of his personal security with his classmates. Unfortunately, however, not every member of the group is equally accepted by others. For various reasons some students are very easily accepted while some others are not. The accepted ones get a sense of belonging and this, it is believed, contributes to their personal development. Therefore, it is desirable that there should be healthy inter-personal relationships among the students in each classroom.

In recent times, a good deal of emphasis has rightly been
laid on the necessity of improving the relationship between the teacher and the students with a view to realising the optimum results from the educational processes in the classroom. Unfortunately, however, the question of improving the relationships among the students studying in a group in a classroom has received less attention than it deserves. In fact, it has so far remained one of the neglected spheres of research in Education, at least in our country. It is usually not fully appreciated that the existence of a climate of healthy relationships among the students in a classroom has a crucial bearing on the success of the educational process.

In order to bring about a healthy social climate of friendship and co-operation in the classroom the school has to strive to bring the socially unaccepted pupils into closer association with others. For this a knowledge of the factors on which peer acceptability depends is a pre-requisite. Also essential is the knowledge of the socio-cultural factors that have influence on the academic achievement of the pupils. The present study intends to examine the interpersonal relationships and some socio-cultural factors that are closely related to education. The study also attempts to investigate the correlation, if any, between academic achievement of children on the one hand and parents' level of education, parents' occupation, educational facilities, family size, ordinal position etc. on the other.

Aside from sleeping, and perhaps playing, there is no other activity that occupies as much of the child's time as that involved in attending school. Apart from the bedroom where the child has his
eyes closed most of the time, there is no single enclosure in which he spends a longer time than he does in the classroom. This being so, a critical analysis and a proper understanding of the different aspects of the teaching-learning situations in the classroom and their impact on the impressionable minds of the growing children are something very vital for all concerned with education.

In many cases the young people have to be in school, whether they want to be or not. In this regard, as Jackson observes, the students have something in common with the members of two other of our social institutions that have involuntary attendance: prisons and mental hospitals. The analogy though dramatic, is not intended to be shocking, and certainly there is no comparison between the unpleasantness of life for inmates of our prisons and mental institutions, on the one hand, and the daily travails of a student, on the other. Yet the school child, like the incarcerated adult, is, in a sense, a prisoner. He too must come to grips with the inevitability of his experience. He too must develop strategies for dealing with the conflict that frequently arises between his natural desires and interests on the one hand and institutional expectations on the other. In the classroom, if frowns are more frequent than smiles, criticisms more abundant than compliments, the students cannot be expected to learn much.

Individual interests and spontaneity should always be encouraged in the classroom. The child who wants to know something remembers it and uses it once he has it; the child who learns something only to please or appease someone else forgets it when the need for pleasing or the danger of not appeasing is past. This is why children quickly forget all but a small part of what they learn in school. It is of no use or interest to them; they do not want, or expect, or even intend to remember it. In the language of John Holt, 'the only difference between bad and good students in this respect is that bad students forget right away, while the good students are careful to wait until after the examinations'.

Such a gloomy picture, however, does not apply to all schools and all students. Many a student goes to school with great enthusiasm and develop profound and extremely rewarding relationships with their teachers. It is, therefore, important to sensitize the teachers to the need of changing the classroom climate so that every child belonging to it can have full sense of participation.

Along with school conditions, home conditions of the child also have important bearing on scholastic achievement. In case of many students it is seen that much that is done in the classroom during the working day is undone during the evenings and weekends when the child is at large. This is because one hundred and eighty days in every year, one day in every week, and all except five hours out of every twenty-four, are spent by the child not at school but

somewhere else — at home, in the street, or wherever he takes his recreation. Therefore to understand the causes of poor achievement of the academically backward child, it is not enough to examine him in the classroom and talk over his failings with the teachers; it is equally essential to study the conditions of his life outside.

In order to help the child in his academic progress all the conditions have to be properly studied and carefully manipulated. It may be argued that experience often shows that even the most meticulous manipulation of any one factor produces only modest gains in a child's performance. But there is no need to be unduly pessimistic about it. If programmes can be developed for all children that involve the enrichment and the co-ordination of family, neighbourhood, and classroom environments, then a set of even modest increments might add up to considerable changes in children's cognitive and affective characteristics. For this a critical survey of the environmental factors and their influence on the education of school children is a great necessity.

Limitations of the present study:- Non-existence of psychological tests, such as intelligence tests, attitude scales, interest inventories etc. in regional language offers a great obstacle in the pursuit of this research.

Collection of data from schools, administration of tests on school students and observation of student-behaviour in various school situations are jobs that involve considerable difficulty and inconvenience. However, because of the extremely helpful and sympathetic attitude of the schools towards the investigator, the
difficulties and inconveniences proved to be much less than what they could be for any other person entirely un-connected with schools. Nevertheless, lack of adequate accessibility to the student in schools puts some limitations.

Lastly, the limitation of time, opportunities and resources prevented the group of students under study from being enlarged so as to allow for the inclusion of children of different age groups.

**Methodology of investigation** : To find out the various correlates of achievement, a lot of data of varied nature were necessary. These were collected from different sources and through different techniques.

The degree of academic achievement of the students were obtained from school records. Most schools neatly maintain the record of scores obtained by each student in different examinations from which one can very easily follow the pattern of progress or otherwise of every individual student.

The degree of acceptance of each student in relation to his or her peers in the classroom was measured by employing the Moreno type of sociometric-technique (vide appendix A). The same sociometric technique was employed in each classroom twice with a time gap between the two administrations in order to generate data for the purpose of determining reliability of the sociometric scores, both of choices-given and of choices-received.

Knowledge about parents' educational attainments, parents' occupations, family sizes, ordinal positions of the children,
economic conditions of the individual families, educational facilities in the homes etc. were obtained through a schedule (vide appendix B). Copies of the schedule were distributed among the students in their classroom and they filled in the schedule in presence of the investigator. Any difficulty faced by them could be readily eliminated in such a face-to-face situation. Almost in all cases the data provided by the students through the schedule were compared and checked with the class teacher's knowledge about them and other available school records.

Besides observing classroom-teaching the investigator has had long individual interviews with a large number of teachers which brought to light such things as causes of absenteeism of students, parents' interest in the education of their wards, teachers' qualities, general classroom environment and many other small but significant facts. Long association of the present investigator with the secondary schools and the opportunity to supervise classroom teaching over a period of about twelve years enabled easy comprehension of many subtle aspects in teaching-learning situations. The Teacher Description Scale used to assess the different aspects of teaching is shown in appendix C.

Homes of many students were visited in order to get a real feel of the socio-economic and socio-cultural level of the families in which the students live. About two hundred families were visited and on the average about two hours were spent in each. In most cases the investigator was accompanied either by a school teacher or by a local person of some social standing capable of handling even
basically unresponsive persons and with insight into human behaviour. Wherever possible, with the kind permission of the family, the important facts were noted down in the Home Description Scale (vide appendix D) during the conversation and in cases were it was embarrassing to do so, important facts were committed to paper immediately after the interview. Memory at times tends to be treacherous and it was here that the companion proved to be of great help. Of course, the company was also greatly helpful in keeping the conversation going without any awkward silence and in harping on a relevant point wherever and whenever the investigator tended to skip over.

Case studies were made in respect of students who were found to be relatively interesting because of their being sufficiently different from the common run. Information about such cases were collected from school records, teachers' opinions, more and longer home visits and from other persons who have intimate knowledge about them.

Through the technique, discussed above, data were collected in respect of about a thousand students that belonged to four single-sex schools of the town of Jorhat, Assam. Most of the students included in the present study belonged to the higher classes, generally class IX, of the secondary schools.

Obviously, the raw-data as such, collected from a large number of persons do not reveal much. They have to be properly processed and subjected to appropriate statistical procedures for the
purpose of drawing correct inferences from them. The academic scores of the students belonging to different classes and schools were converted into standard scores which, unlike raw scores, permit comparison. In a much similar manner the sociometric scores were also converted to comparable forms.

The dependance or otherwise of one variable on another was tested by employing chi-square technique. In order to determine the degree and direction of relation between different variables, coefficients of correlation were computed. Depending on the nature of data and result desired different correlation coefficients were computed. Significance of the computed coefficients were determined at .05 and .01 levels of confidence. For easy comprehension, the data in appropriate places are represented in tables, graphs, sociograms etc.