

An Exploratory Study on Teachers' Emotionally Abusive Practices at Secondary School Level

Fazli Amin^{*}, Maroof Bin Rauf[†], Sajjad Hussain[‡]

Abstract

Emotional abuse practices used by teachers in the classrooms has serious effects on the students' overall personality and academic achievements. Therefore, this study is aimed to explore the emotionally abusive practices of teachers at secondary school level in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study used exploratory qualitative research design for analyzing this important issue. Population of the study was secondary school teachers and their 10th grade students. Purposive sampling technique was used for interview data collection. The data was collected through semi-structured interview protocol related to study objectives. Data was collected from 12 teachers and 18 students through face-to-face meeting with prior consent. After this the data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The results revealed that secondary school students face teachers' emotionally abusive behavior (practices) at classroom in the form of-demeaning, controlling, dominating, and destabilizing. Teachers' data results revealed that teachers are not using emotionally abusive practices intentionally, however, sometimes due to the disruptive behaviors of students, they do follow certain inappropriate behaviors in classroom. The study recommended that teachers' may be properly trained in domain students' psychology, and the content related to this issue may be added in the curriculum of pre-service teacher education. Besides this there may be awareness campaigns regarding this problem by government and principals of the schools.

Keyword: *emotionally abusive practices; classroom environment; teacher-student interaction; secondary schools; teachers' perceptions; students' perceptions; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

Background of the Study

The activities of an adult perpetrated on a child that endangers the child's mental, emotional, and physical health are referred to as "abuse," (Brassard, Hart, & Glaser, 2020). The term 'abuse' is classified into four distinct categories: physical, sexual, neglect, and emotional (Norman., Byambaa, Butchart, Scott & Vos, 2012). All these types of abuse have negative influence on child health, but emotional abuse is widely recognized as one of the most detrimental

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forms of child abuse due to its severe impact on the growth and development of children (Li, Wang, & Ye, 2021). There's no universally accepted definition of emotional abuse, and it differs from culture to culture (Theoklitou, Kabitsis, & Kabitsi, 2012).

Emotional abuse is a term that refers to both intentional and unintentional behaviors carried out by an adult that have a detrimental effect on the mental health of a child (Rees, 2010). These behaviors can include refusing, isolating, torturing, ignoring, or otherwise corrupting the child. This is a practice by using mean words said to a child that are meant to hurt their mental or social health. Emotional abuse is a non-contact type of maltreatment that is less observable than other forms of abuse. It refers to both vocal and nonverbal acts that interfere with a child's emotional and social development and are harmful to the child. Researchers have categorized several behaviors under the framework of childhood emotional abuse, which poses difficulties in precisely describing and distinguishing emotional abuse. The determination of whether a kid has been subjected to emotional abuse is contingent on two factors: first, whether the behavior in question conforms to the criteria of abuse established in state law, and second, whether the child is put in danger by the behavior of the parent or any elder. Emotional abuse encompasses a range of behaviors that have detrimental effects on the psychological welfare of a child (Glaser, 2011).

Emotional abuse of school students is a serious problem because this is the very important stage of development and experiences occurs in this stage has everlasting effect on holistic development. Emotional abuse of secondary school students by teachers is a serious but unnoticed problem in Pakistan, as there is no legislation, awareness, and sensitization mechanisms available to tackle this issue. It has the potential to limit students' development and productivity and beside this also destroying their self-concept in the classroom (Rafique, Ashraf & Yasmin, 2020). A child being emotionally abused is vulnerable to multiple risks including psychological distress, anxiety, and in certain specific circumstance to suicidal accidents too. The persistence of this state of experiences affects the child's emotional and social development. These emotional abusive practices have negative psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation (Trevor, Buser., Juleen, & Buser, 2013). According to these researchers, there is a connection between emotional abuse and higher rates of Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Researched proved that children who are subjected to emotional abuse practices may face immediate as well as long-term impairments to their behavioral, cognitive, affective, social, and physiological

functioning. These effects can be seen in the children over the course of their lifetime. In addition to this, it has been linked to lasting brain damage, which can manifest in several different ways, such as increased verbal activity, limbic irritability, stalled development of the left hemisphere, and insufficient integration between the hemispheres.

From school perspectives the emotional abuse of students in schools, more than half of the pupils' reported neglect as the most frequently occurring behavior, one-third of them reported emotional abuse, and almost one-tenth reported physical abuse (Usakli, 2012). Likewise, various research studies investigated the emotional abuse behaviours of secondary school students. Italian middle school pupils reported high rates of emotional abuse (98%) from their teachers, including behaviours that were insulting, discriminatory, and domineering, according to research by Longobardi et al. (2018).

It was shown that males had a higher probability of being mistreated, and they also scored worse on the Achievement scale. Similarly, Ayenibiowo and Akinbode (2011) found that the incidence of bullying was higher among boys and that there was a correlation between bullying and emotional distress. Johnson (2020) emphasized the need to understand victims' perspectives and suggested ways for reducing violence and abuse in schools. Furthermore, it was also explored by Okoza, Aluede, and Ojugo (2011) that male students were subjected to a greater amount of emotional abuse compared to their female counterparts. Furthermore, senior students were subjected to more behaviours that were domineering and terrifying. Therefore, Osei-hwedie and Hobona (2001) brought attention to the importance of providing teachers with training that empowers them to recognize and assist children who have been emotionally abused. Walshe (2016) identified five roles of school staff in the management of children who engage in self-harm i.e., psychological role, psychological availability, and emotional impact. Kraemer-Holland (2021) talked about the advantages of mindfulness techniques for enhancing students' social, emotional, and physical well-being. McKenzie (2009) emphasized the importance of addressing the emotional abuse that instructors inflict on pupils of color, as this can have detrimental impacts on the kids' emotional and academic health.

These findings highlight the prevalence and impact of emotionally abusive practices in secondary schools. There are extensive studies carried out on emotional abuse (Shumba, 2002). But scared literature on emotional abusive practices used by teachers in the classroom, a setting and an environment where students are solely dependent on teacher behavior and attitude. Therefore, this important study was conducted to explore the emotional abusive practices used by teachers in the classroom for the purpose to hear the voices of

students. Besides these, to hear the teachers' opinions that why they are using emotionally abusive language and attitude in the classroom.

Problem Statement

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a vital landscape and province of Pakistan plays an important role in the development of adolescent. Teacher plays an important and crucial role in shaping the personalities of students. However, there is enough evidence that emotional abusive practices used by teachers in the classroom has worse effect on students' wellbeing, personality and cognitive skills. Classroom environment plays central role in the overall development of students.

The development of conducive or unconducive classroom environment is developed by teachers. If teachers create unconducive environment through the use of emotional abusive practices in different forms including demeaning behaviors, biasness, controlling and dominating attitudes, intimidating and destabilizing actions, as well as distancing and diverse behaviors. These practices discourage and demotivate students from their studies. Besides this the age of secondary school students is known as developmental stage in different domains including personality.

So, the above-mentioned practices not only damage their academics but also their personality. These practices of teachers deprived nation from strong and developed manpower. Besides this, there is a lack of empirical studies on internet about emotional abusive practices used by teachers in the premises of classroom through the lens of students especial in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Therefore, this study was designed to explore the nature of emotionally abusive practices used by teachers in the classroom at secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Study Objectives

This study intended to explore:

- a. Teachers' perceptions about their classroom emotionally abusive practices at secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
- b. Students' experiences about their teachers' emotionally abusive practices at secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Research Questions

Following research questions were formulated for this study.

- a. How teachers perceive emotionally abusive practices used by them in classroom at secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?
- b. What are the experiences of students about their teachers' classroom emotionally abusive practices at secondary school level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan?

Research Methods and Procedures

For this work, an exploratory qualitative research design was used. Exploratory study design in education means using experiments to find new ways to make and improve lessons, instead of just accepting or rejecting hypotheses that have already been made (Reza, Chowdhury, Li, Gandhamaneni, & Williams, 2022). It's a way for language teachers to keep improving their skills by learning about what goes on in the classroom and how to change their lessons to fit (Yanto, 2022). Exploratory study design also shows how important creativity is in education by focusing on the changing and related links between the creative process and the teaching-learning process (Guerra, & Villa, 2019).

As the nature (emotionally abusive practices used by teachers) is a subjective concept from teachers and students' point of view, therefore, a reflective, in-depth exploration contributed into the exploration of the selected research phenomenon. two semi-structured interviews guide (teachers and students) were developed after thorough study of relevant literature. it was validated and piloted to ensure the credibility and authenticity of the collected data from the study participants. Themes were generated after pilot study and were discussed with the participants for authenticity of data. A few themes were remodified and finalized. Inter rater reliability procedure was used for ensuring reliability of the data.

Purposive sampling technique was used for interview data collection. A total of 12 teachers and 18 students participated in the study with prior consent. Ethical considerations of the study were followed through an informed consent, their rights and responsibilities, and confidentiality of the data. Through frequent visits to the study participants, rapport was developed and as per the convenience of the study participant, the interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded for the purpose of data analysis. For the purpose of clarity, confirmations, and authenticity of the information, the participants were cross questioned too. The data get saturated earlier in teachers as compared to students, therefore, the number of students' participants was high as compared to teachers.

Data were analyzed by following the steps suggested by Brown and Clark (2014) (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2)

generating codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. All the steps of thematic analysis were utilized from transcription of the interview data till the discussion of the emerged themes related to the classroom emotionally abusive practices of teachers at classroom level in government secondary schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Results and Discussion

Based on the interview analysis of teachers and students the following themes were extracted and generated. Different forms of emotional abusive practices were highlighted and discussed in light of relevant literature. These themes and subthemes were represented in the following diagrams for comprehensive overview of the prevailing emotional abusive practices by teachers in the classroom and coupled with existing literature. The purpose of this section is deep understanding of the complexities of emotional abusive practices in the classroom in teacher-students' dynamic. Furthermore, this section discusses the students' experiences along with their teachers' opinions of factors contributing to these practices and to highlight the urgent need of this problem in school perspectives.

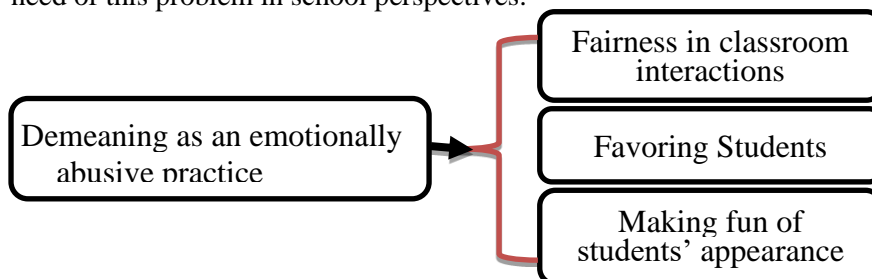


Figure 1. (Theme 1) demeaning practices of teachers in classroom

Teachers reported that they are not using emotional abuse practices in classroom, however, they are involved in certain unsocial practices such as favoring some students due to their intelligences, abilities, and active participation in classroom interactions. They also stated that sometime for humor and joke purpose they make fun of students' actions, and appearance, in rare cases they do so due to their emotionally exhausted states of mind. These findings show that they are unaware of this important phenomenon and unconsciously using these practices. Claudio, and et al (2018) found that Emotional abuse is prevalent in Italian schools. Abiodun, and et al (2013) found that Gender, age, class, and school type are the predicting contributors of teachers' psychological abuse. In this perspectives Okoza, Jolly. (2008) suggested that teachers should be educated in such a manner that they internalize principles of unconditional positive regard for each student equally. Adriana, and et al (2007) recommended that

school responsible authorities and counselors should streamline effective ways and means for identifying and controlling emotional abuse.

Similarly, students reported that calling names, favoring some students over other, and making fun of students' physical appearance are the common practices of their classroom teachers. One of the student's participants (SP-3) said that,

It is the weapon of some of our teachers to start laughing at students' appearance, their pronunciation, humiliating low performing students via sentences of Na Kaam Ka Na Kaaj Ka, Dushman Anaaj Ka (نہ کام کا نہ کاج کا دشمن اناج کا). I have been observing for a long time that some teachers do frequently use abusive language, they are naming students in every class as per his character/performance/ and physical outlook. Such behaviors of teachers became a trademark of those students even among their class fellows and society.

There were multiple stories students shared with hesitations, they didn't even name themselves, but these stories were common at classroom level at elementary and secondary level. Another student participant added that sometimes teachers do such things but they are unaware about the impact of such minor actions on the overall life of students, he added the story of his classmate of grade 9th who is now dropout from school due to this practice. He (SP-5) reported that

Sheerin was an outstanding student, and Sir XYZ often criticize his family background, his performance even if he mistakenly made any error he was supposed to stand in the class for a long time, and so many things I cannot share even, but I believe it was only Sir XYZ due to whom he left the school.

In nutshell teachers were unintentionally involved in demeaning, favoring students based on intelligence, family background and low performances in schools. Furthermore, name-calling, and making fun of students' physical appearance were the most occurring abusive practices in the high schools. There was a clear difference in the perceptions of teachers and students about the demeaning abusive type practices of students at classroom level. These results were in accordance with the results of Witkowska, and Menckel (2005) who concluded that students at elementary level face name-calling, and unacceptable behaviors of teachers during classroom interactions.

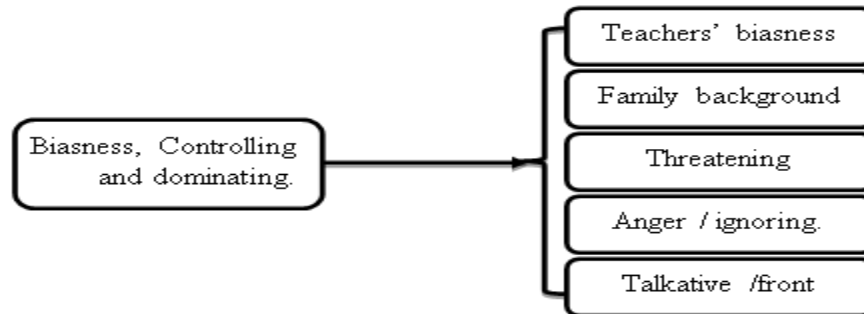


Figure 2. (Themes 2); biasness, controlling and dominating behavior.

Teachers considered that they were not biased to students while interacting at classroom during teaching learning process. They treat all students equally, treat them with dignity, respect, and sympathy. They give equal chance of participation to all the students; however, talkative, intelligent, and front seater students do actively participate in classroom discussions. Sometimes, it is the course, time, and nature of students particularly, in overcrowded classroom few students overwhelmingly participate as compared to the rest of the class, but with no exceptions on personal grounds. One of the teacher participants (TP-2) said that

To most of the teachers' students are students, they don't consider their family background, physique, and socio-economic status etc., but they are students only, the only and only quality of student is his keenness, intelligence, neatness and above all his punctuality and patience for learning that make him more important for teacher. Yes, if some teachers are involved in such negative behaviors is rare but these behaviors are devastating for students' academics and their future lives.

Teachers perceived that they might did these practices without any planned activity. While students reported that some of the teachers intentionally involved in abusive behavior and practices, they are biased in dealing students, they give more attention to intelligent students, students belong to rich socio-economic backgrounds, particular race (families), and they do control them through anger. Some of the students believed that teachers (majority) follow threatening attitude to control students' behavior in classroom, some aggressive students have been labeled by the teachers with different titles in Pashto such as Gaghar Mar جهگڑمار (Fighter), Motta موټا (Fat),

Mangghak منگک (Mice) etc. In this perspective Mr. Asim (SP-12) opined that

In our class teachers' biasness is operant, as they deal with Mr. Kaleem, Aftab, and Akhtar differently as compared to the rest of students because of the family background and Kaleem is intelligent too. Further Sir, SS Hussain is always in an angry mode, and never deal students in a nice manner. One of the most frequent sentences of Sir SS Hussain is this is your last chance, now you will see my different face, and such things are frequent in our classes.

Therefore, it was concluded that teachers are largely involved in bias, controlling, and dominating behaviors with students in classroom interactions. These results are different than the results of Witkowska, and Menckel (2005) as they concluded that sexual harassment is more frequent at school level in Sweden as compared to biasness, controlling, and dominating behavior of teachers. However, the findings of Sultan, and Jufri (2019) were similar, as their study revealed that teachers do follow different controlling mechanisms at classroom level.

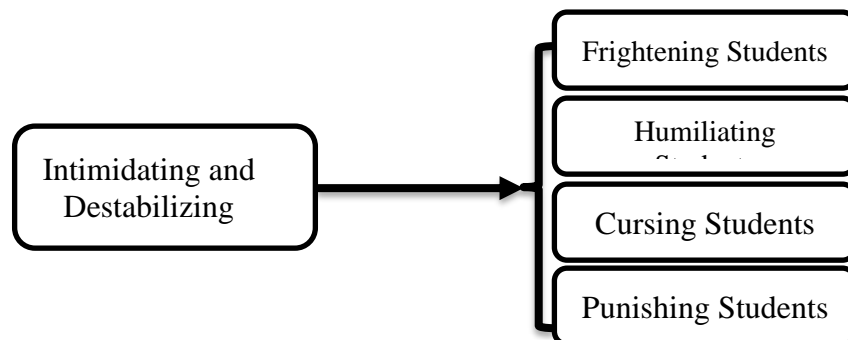


Figure 3. (Themes-3) Intimidating and destabilizing.

Teachers agreed that they sometimes frightened their students with the aim of making them conscious about their academic future, but they never humiliate students, however, they do advise students very frequently. They were also of the view that they don't curse students in any situation because it's a female kind of thing which doesn't deserve to male teachers. The teachers viewed that due to government policy they don't punish students even if they did not complete their homework. They refer students to the head of the school when involved in disruptive behavior who often call their parents to intimate them about students' disruptive behaviors.

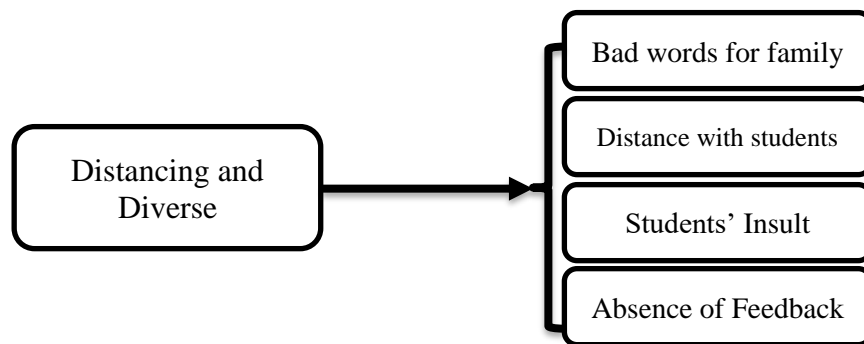
Students as compared to teachers have different perceptions as they consider teachers guilty in continuously frightening students with different mechanisms at classroom level, sometime they frightened the students by expelling them from the school, detained them in examination, making complaint to their parents/principal etc. Students also opined that teachers on the name of advice humiliate students in front of classmates, one of the student participants (SP-7) said that

Everyone know teacher humiliate students, when he is advising a student in front of his classmates, the last two sentences of classical BEZATTI IS ALWAYS MAIN AP AWR AP K FUTURE K LEYAY CONCERNED HUN, BAQI AP KE MARZE. If the teacher is really concerned and intends to advice a student why not in private, why in front of his classmates.

Majority of the students reported that teachers rarely curse students with their behavioral problems, and no compliance to teachers' directives, but Sir Shams, Sir Naeem and Sir Yahya mostly do curse students as they do not punish them. Furthermore, most of the teachers do punish the students via different methods such as some teachers ignore students, and others make them stand on the bench for a while and so on and so forth, but they do punish students.

These results complied to the study results of Eriyanti (2018) who concluded that due to power gap teachers are frequently involved in cursing students, teachers' anger is exploded with humiliating students, and following different mechanisms for students' punishment, similarly, the results of Chen (2018) also revealed that teachers are involved in the emotional abuse of student via cursing, frightening, and punishing them at classroom level.

Figure 4. Themes from teachers' distancing, and diverse behaviors.



Distancing and diverse are devastating behaviors of teachers in classroom teaching learning process. However, teachers disagreed that they do so, they never say bad things about students' families, and establish close academic relationships with students, they respect

students' privacy, and deal them in a dignified manner. They also viewed that teachers' welcome students whenever, they ask for help, assistance, and guidance. A teacher (TP-9) added that.

Teaching is a 7/24 job, once a teacher is always a teacher, you cannot separate yourself from your students, you cannot deny your teaching position in any situations. You are expected to work for children every time, so how a teacher can keep distance from students?

Students during interviews opined that some teachers say bad words about some families, like they consider XYZ families as kidnappers, fighters (Jagharmaar(جهگڑمار), and Interest takers (Soodkhwara(سود خواره). Some teachers don't like students to visit their office even if the need guidance. On the name of advice some teachers are in search of the opportunities to show some students down in front of others.

Students also opined that their teachers don't gave feedback to students on their work, and only few teachers gave feedback which is always late and is of no use of students, they also believed that teachers always maintain distance with students, and they allow very few students after class time to office. Overall, teachers' perceptions were different than of students and mostly the students were agreed that their teachers to a large extent involved in emotional abusive practices at classroom level, they do follow such practices intentionally and unintentionally or consciously and unconsciously, which sometimes they consider as strategy to ensure the discipline among students, sometimes they use ignoring, distancing, threatening, and frightening practices with the purpose to punish students for their academics (homework, assignments, classroom test low performances, disruptive behavior etc.). The results of the study of Longobardi, Settanni, Prino, and Gastaldi (2018) revealed that teachers denied about their classroom emotionally abusive practices however, almost all students reported that their teachers do emotionally abusive practices in classroom during teaching learning process.

Conclusions

The extracted themes, results and discussions from the previous literature enable the researchers to conclude that:

The act of teachers abusing students can have negative impacts on both academic and social outcomes. Child gender, family type, and father's education level are predictors for emotional abuse. In addition, emotional abuse of students is quite frequent in the Aden Governorate, which is located in Yemen. Italian middle school pupils reported high rates of emotional abuse from their teachers.

Teachers use emotionally abusive practices in the classroom intentionally and unintentionally. Most of the teachers are even unaware about the difference between abusive and non-abusive behavior while interacting with students at classroom level. As some teachers considered it as controlling mechanisms for students' discipline measure, and like more.

The most frequently abusive behavior of teachers as reported by their students includes, making fun of students' physique, pacing sarcastic phrases on students with low academic performances, frightening and threatening students, ignoring, and favoring students over other students on certain grounds (biasness), and students' insult in front of classmates.

Furthermore, the intimidating and destabilizing behaviors of teachers were also significantly reported by students, they also reported that some teachers target specific families, as they have tagged the students from those family as aggressive, low performing, and unsocial people.

Another significant issue associated with teachers' emotionally abusive practices was that mostly teachers even don't consider abusive, they consider it legal and socially approved strategies for managing students disruptive and academic behaviors, which is devastating, as it reflects the weak area of pre-service education of the teachers and lack of in-service teachers' trainings.

Recommendations

1. The issue is significant and unavoidable in nature as it impacts are long lasting and devastating in nature, therefore, it is strongly recommended to the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education to devise a policy related to the emotional abusive practices occurring at elementary and secondary school level. For this purpose, consultative seminars may be arranged to come up with collective wisdom and ensure a comprehensive policy.
2. Furthermore, as reflected from the study results most of the teachers do not consider it significant, some of them consider these abusive practices as strategies for managing students non-academic behaviors etc., therefore, the Elementary and Secondary education directorate is recommended to develop a capacity building mechanism for in-service teachers in collaboration with universities teacher education department, Provincial Institute of Teacher Education, Regional Institute of Teacher Education faculty members.
3. The school heads (Principals) are recommended to arrange awareness seminars for students about the nature of classroom

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emotionally abusive practices, its reporting mechanisms, and mechanisms for resolving such issue at school level.

4. The school administration is also recommended to establish a complaint cell at school level and a counseling center so that the affected students may register their complaint in one place and both teachers and students may be provided counseling service at school level with the aim to eradicate the ill, and evil practices from school lives of students.

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