

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ACADEMIC STRESS ON UNDERACHIEVERS IN SOCIAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation aims at studying the contribution of the areas related to academic stress in causing underachievement in Social Studies. A sample of 30 Senior Secondary Schools was taken from five blocks of Gurgaon District : Sohna, Pataudi, Gurgaon, Manesar and Farrukh Nagar. Underachievers in Social Studies thus identified on the basis of secured marks in 10th Board exam conducted by Board of School Education, Haryana; were studied by conducting interview schedules with students, their parents and their Social Studies' teachers. This study at hand is able to uncover two central findings. First, what does underachievement connotes? And second is there any impact of academic stress related factors/causes on underachieving pupils in Social Studies?

Key Words: *Academic stress, Underachievement, Government Schools, Private Schools*

INTRODUCTION

Education aims at tapping the potentialities of individuals to the highest possible levels. The structure and process of schooling are planned to make teaching-learning process effective to realize these potentialities. Notwithstanding these efforts, schooling does not uniformly enable all children to achieve according to their capabilities. Very often we hear teachers and parents state he/she "could have done better" which is indicative of the recognition that school process has not sufficiently enabled maximal realization of potential. Despite being widely prevalent, this problem is only partly understood and is termed in educational literature as underachievement. "The term underachiever has come to mean a student who appears to possess ability to achieve considerably higher grades than his present record shows (Wellington and Wellington, 1964). Often, it is mistakenly assumed that under achievement is located solely within the child. Comment such as 'not working to potential', 'lazy', or worse, 'dumb' are labels that school regularly use for the students with poor grades. These are labels that parents and students often internalize and accept as the reasons for poor academic performance. It is now accepted that academic performance of many students is less than as expected from their estimated intellectual level. However, school performance is particularly considered an important reflection of a child's

cognitive growth. The academic performance of a student is often judged only in terms of marks scored, leaving the basic potential level out of consideration.

ACADEMIC STRESS AND UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Students have to face many demands such as understanding the syllabus, performing well in examinations and meeting expectations of the parents. These demands can create stress to such an extent that the students' functioning can be impaired. Academic stress is mental distress due to anticipated frustration associated with academic failure (Bisht, 1989). It can result in frustration, conflict, anxiety and pressure. A major source of stress for students is as reflected by the report of the Yashpal Committee (1994). According to this Committee, "overloading in the curriculum, acceleration of knowledge, too much home work, and an impersonal student-teacher relationship are time and again emphasized" leading to stress in students.

Students and parents are deeply concern about the students' performance in Mathematics and Sciences because of the professional opportunities these subjects offer. To a lesser extent, students and parents remain concerned about language achievement as this is a primary tool for communication that is essential for future opportunities. There is little

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and no concern with regard to achievement in Social Studies. Students and parents view this discipline as the last resort of opportunities. Yet in many ways, the domain of Social Studies is vitally important for democratic societies. Citizenship building, irrespective of the walk of life depends on systematic understanding of the historical, social, political, economic, cultural understanding of the society and the nation. This is possible only through engaged studies of Social Studies as a discipline in schools especially at secondary stage.

It is surprising amongst the vast array of researchers related to underachievement; the investigator could not find many studies of underachievement in Social Studies. As a professional teacher of Social Studies, the investigator proposes to further inquire into the area of underachievement in Social Studies. Related available literature shows possibilities for this line of research. The path breaking study of Alex George (2007) Children's Perception of Sarkar shows how great is the divide between the idealized conceptions of "Government" in Civics (Political Science) text books and the middle and high school children's own experienced realities of government. Few other scholars Batra, Thapan, Farooqi have also explored specific aspects of understanding of social realities in text books and among children. The present study is a small step to further link Social Studies education with the children's achievement. Why do some children score poorly in Social Studies compared to other subjects?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF ACADEMIC STRESS

Underachievement: A student who has secured 40 or below 40 marks in Social Studies and in other subjects, he is not securing same 40 marks but more than 40 marks in final exams of 10th class is called under-achiever.

Academic Stress: A state of imbalance between the academic demands made on a student from outside sources like parents, teachers and society and his/her capabilities to cope with them (Bhatia, 2001). In present study, the reasons of academic stress were studied under Parent's aspirations and expectations from their child, fear of examination, fear of Social Studies teacher, career worries and Social Studies teachers'

expectations of the academic performance from the student.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does underachievement connote?
2. Is underachievement in Social Studies prevalent in the sample schools?
3. What is the impact of academic stress related factors/ reasons for underachievement in Social Studies among secondary school children in the sample schools?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of present study are as follows:

1. To understand how the term under-achievement is constructed to identify under-achievers in Social Studies.
2. To ascertain the effect if any, of academic stress on children underachieving in Social Studies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Two approaches were adopted for the study. Quantitative achievement data was collected from sample schools from which underachievers in Social studies were identified. Then in the next stage, qualitative approach was used to collect data regarding academic stress.

SAMPLING PROCESS

Following steps are followed for selection of sample:

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling technique is used in the present study.

Population: The researcher proposed to study under-achievement of secondary school students in Social Studies. Secondary school students comprise of children studying in classes 8th to 10th. For the purpose of this study, those children who had passed class 10th in Gurgaon district and opted for Arts stream in class 11th form the population of the study from which students under-achieving in Social Studies was identified using a set criterion and these children constituted the sample for the study.

Sampling Criterion: The criterion used for identifying under-achievement for the purpose of

this study comprised of those children who had secured 40% or below 40% in Social Studies while securing more than 40% in all other subjects at the class 10th board exam but who have opted Arts stream at class 11th.

Sample for the study: As the study focuses only on under-achievement in Social Studies in Gurgaon district, a list of number of schools in the district as per the web sites gurgaon.nic.in and hbse.nic.in was procured. The researcher visited 50 Schools (14 Govt. schools and 36 Pvt. Schools) seeking permission for the study. Of these 48 schools granted permission for data collection. It was seen that the numbers of school per tehsil varied from 6-14. In order to maintain parity in tehsils; 6 schools per tehsil namely Gurgaon, Sohna, Manesar, Pataudi and Farrukh Nagar; were selected based on convenience of the researcher for the study. Therefore, 30 schools were selected as sample for the study.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

Achievement Records Result record of all the Arts students who passed 10th Board Class from Board of School Education, Haryana.

In-depth interviews were conducted to parents, Social Studies teachers and children underachieving in Social Studies.

Analysis and interpretation of Data: Data is analyzed qualitatively on the basis of comprehensive profiles of identified underachievers. The profiles were generated based on the in depth interviews with students, parents and teachers, their home visits and their school visits.

Delimitations of the Study: The present study is limited to children underachieving in Social Studies who are studying the Arts stream in Senior Secondary School students of Gurgaon district who were admitted into class 11th in the year 2013.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FACTORS RELATED TO ACADEMIC STRESS

1. Parental Aspiration: Parental aspiration has two sided affect on the performance of any student. On the one side, it improves the

achievement level of the student while on the other side; it increases pressures on the student to meet the desired expectation of them.

Table No. 1.1: Parental Aspiration

S. No.	Parental Aspiration	Number of Students
1	Government Job	03
2	Army officer	03
3	Teacher	05
4	Leave on student's wish	05
5	Computer Repairing	01
6	Marriage after intermediate	03
	Total	20

Variation in parental aspiration is noted in the present study. It is observed that parents of 5 students had left the selection of career option on their children. 5 parents aspire that their child will go for teaching profession while 3 parents want their child to be an army officer. Other 3 parents expect government job of any kind for their ward whereas another 3 parents think that they should marry their girl child after completing their intermediate. Only one child's parents want to train their child in computer repairing, hoping that on that basis, he can start his own business/shop. All this reveals that most of the parents do have expectations from their children.

The present study seems to suggest that a male child's education and his career are found to be more important and valuable than a girl child. Three girl students had no hope for studies after passing their class 12th. This decision would be taken by their family members. However, besides these students, parental aspiration seems a significant factor in developing their attitude towards studies but it did not appear from any perspective that it may be

the reason of their underachievement in Social Studies.

2. Parents' aspiration and expectations from their child: 19 students stated that their parents insist that they study but do not pressurize them. Only one student Ak told the investigator that he is studying only for the sake of his parents. If they insist for further study, then he will go for that otherwise he has no interest in studies.

3. Fear of examinations: One student So admitted that he felt uneasiness during examinations. He found himself in a dilemma regarding the content of the subjects what to study and what to leave out.

I: aap kaise student rahe hain padhhai me? (How have you been a student in studies?)

S: thheek thheek rahe hain. Koshish poori karte hain, exam time me kuchh problem ho jaati thi (Average/So-So. I made full efforts, on exam time, some problem happened.)

I: kaisi problem? (Which problem?)

S: ji dar sa lagta hai ki kaise ho gaya? Kaise hoga?(I felt frightened as something happened.)

I: kaisa dar?(Which type of fear?)

S: sapne me aisa lagta hai jaise paper chhoot gaya aur hum sote rahe gaye. Mentally problem ho jati hai (In dreams, it seems that paper has left and I was left sleeping. Some mentally problem occurs)

4. Fear of Social Studies teachers: Students did not report any fear of their teachers. All were supportive and like any other subject teachers they never gave difficult assignments which could not be completed by the recommended guides. This shows that the whole teaching-learning environment of Social Studies was mutually accepted by both teachers and learners in the present study. Therefore, fear from Social Studies' teachers is not accepted as a cause of under-achievement in the present study.

5. Teacher's expectation of the academic performance from the student: No under-achiever has reported any type of teacher's expectation from them; they have ever demanded. This shows that factor related to expectations of Social Studies' teachers is not approved as a cause of under-achievement in Social Studies in the present study. The findings of the present study is in agreement with Berube Bruce N. and Seigle Del (1995) which also suggest that a teacher should recognize talent of

the students and help them in gaining their self confidence.

6. Career Choices: The following conversation suggests that the parents of Nu want their child to study hard for becoming a successful person in life whereas the student wishes to make money as soon as possible. He told the investigator that for this he will have to complete a computer course and there is no need to study after 12th class for doing this course.

Table 1.2: Career Choices

S. No.	Careers	No. of Students
1	Army officer	03
2	Teacher	07
3	Businessman	01
4	Computer Repairing	01
5	Police officer	01
6	ITI	03
8	Maintenance work of car	01
9	TT (Railways)	01
10	Not decided	01
11	On Family Wish	01
Total		20

Out of these 20 students, 18 have decided their career for future. One student Mo's parents wanted him to do some professional course. His father had earlier recommended him to take Commerce which was not allowed by the school as his percentage was low. He wants to do a diploma in electrical engineering from ITI which may now not be possible because he is now a student of Arts, a situation which he may lead to some academic related stress.

The narratives of students and their home environment presented in this study are in line with the studies of Ford (1957) and Siegel (2006) who found that home-student-school partnerships are essential for achievement of students from marginalized sections. However, the present study was not in agreement with the

findings of the studies conducted by Patel & Meenakshi (2000) wherein low-income families were found to be less cohesive, allowed less expression of feelings, had more conflicts and were less independent. The narratives of parents and students in the present study show that parents are supportive, students clearly expressed their aspirations and did not appear to be conflicted. The present study is however in line with the study of Christine et. al (2011) which shows that relationship with teacher is essential for achievement. This was emphasized by students in the present study.

FINDINGS

1. **Parents' aspiration and expectations from their child:** It was found that 19 students' parents insist them for study but do not pressurize them.
2. **Fear of examinations:** It was revealed from this study that only one student admitted that he felt uneasiness during examinations. He found himself in a dilemma regarding the content of the subjects what to study and what to leave out.
3. **Fear of Social Studies teachers:** The major finding of the present study was that students did not report any fear of their teachers. All were supportive and like any other subject teachers they never gave difficult assignments which could not be completed by the recommended guides. Therefore, fear from Social Studies' teachers is not accepted as a cause of under-achievement in the present study.
4. **Teacher's expectation of the academic performance from the student:** It was analysed that no under-achiever has reported any type of teacher's expectation from them; they have ever demanded. This shows that factor related to expectations of Social Studies' teachers is not approved as a cause of under-achievement in Social Studies in the present study.
5. **Career Choices:** in the present study, out of these 20 students, 18 have decided their career for future. Only one student's parents wanted him to do some professional course. His father had earlier recommended him to take Commerce which was not allowed by the school as his percentage was low. He

wants to do a diploma in electrical engineering from ITI which may now not be possible because he is now a student of Arts, a situation which he may lead to some academic related stress.

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