

Academic Performance of Children as a Function of Interaction with Parents and Teachers

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ABSTRACT The present research explores the relationship that exists between the parental interaction and attitude of the teachers with the academic performance of school going children. The sample comprised of 200 academic underachievers studying in classes' 4th - 6th, failing to perform satisfactorily without any apparent reasons. Besides them their parents (n=200) and teachers (n=189) were also included. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. The entire sample was spread over five educational zones of Jammu, and from a total of 59 schools the children were selected by random sampling procedure. The parents and teachers were however, selected by purposive sampling procedure. The tools used for data collection included Parent Child Interaction Scale (Thirtha and Gururaja, 1982), a self devised Teachers Attitude rating scale and academic learning tests. The results reveal that parent-child interaction and teacher's attitude significantly influenced the academic performance of the children. On the parent-child interaction scale most of the parents (49%) were found to score moderately, followed by 28% and 23% who scored low and high respectively. On the whole, there existed a significant positive correlation between parent-child interaction and academic learning and individually also each of the three academic areas- Reading, Spelling and Mathematics were also significantly correlated with the parent-child interaction index. The attitudes of the teachers especially their attitudes towards teaching as a profession, towards facilities offered at school to children and towards academic underachievers were found to be significantly related to academic learning (all the three areas together) of the children.

Academic performance of children is affected by a multitude of factors; some of these factors are intrinsic such as the intelligence level while others are extrinsic such as the home and school environment. These dimensions and their factors are not only very large in number but also their influence is complex in nature. The role of parents in their children's education has long been recognized as a significant factor in educational success and school improvement (Epstien, 1996; Safran, 1996). Children receiving support from the family at home and the oral tradition followed is particularly helpful in helping children acquire academic skills such as numeric skills (Jones and Farah 1995). Researches have been carried out where the richness of the home environment is recognized (Bouchard 1996; Civil 1996; Macbeath 1996). On the other hand, the role played by the teachers is far more important than the infrastructure available at the school (Singh and Sexana 1996). The attitudes held by the teachers especially influence the quality of interaction with

the children. In recent years many educational organizations and international conferences concentrate almost entirely on the issue of partnership between schools and parents.

With the underlying assumption that the parents and teachers play a significant role in shaping the academic learning of the children the present study was designed. The study tends to assess the nature of parent child interaction and the attitudes held by the teachers towards various aspects related to academics. It further explores the relationship of these two dimensions with the academic performance of the children. The study has been specifically carried out on academic underachievers primarily to assess the influence of these two dimensions on this group of children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Procedure: The sample consisted of 200 academic underachievers studying in classes 4th to 6th, having no apparent cause for underachievement. These students were selected from a larger sample of 593 underachievers, who had a record of past three years (obtaining below 40% marks in aggregate in annual examination) to support the contention that they had been performing poorly over a period of time. This sample

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was obtained by employing stratified sampling technique from 59 schools spread over the entire Jammu block (J and K state). Lottery method was used for the selection of the classes. The students were made a part of the study only if they fitted into the exclusion criteria's. These students had to be free from all sorts of physical/sensory defects, emotional disturbances, should not have been mentally challenged, should not belong to the disadvantaged sections of the society and should have no episodes of familial discords in the near past. Apart from the children, one parent each (n=200) and their teachers (n=189) were selected through purposive sampling.

Tools: The following sets of tools were used for data collection:

1. *For Exclusion Criteria:* Raven's colored Progressive Matrices were used to obtain I.Q scores; Child Behaviour Checklist (Sood 1997) was used to obtain a general behavioral profile of the children, observations and interviews for screen-ing of children belonging to low SES, or suffering from physical or sensory deficiencies.

2. *Academic Tasks:* The academic performance of the children was assessed in three areas namely- reading, spelling and mathematics. The reading and spelling tests consisted of a set of ten words each in the two languages (Hindi and English) selected randomly from the textbooks used at school. The informal graded word list was prepared from class 1st to 6th to assess the sight-reading and spelling performance of the children. Mathematics consisted of problems based on simple addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division and problems based on every day experiences.

3. *Parent-Child Interaction:* The Parent-Child Interaction Scale (Thirtha and Gururaja 1981) was used to assess the nature of their interaction. These scale were filled only by the parents.

4. *Teacher Attitude Scale:* A rating scale reflecting the teacher's attitude towards teaching profession, school administration, teaching practices and systems, facilities offered to the children at school, and attitude towards academic under-achievers was constructed and used.

Analysis: For the analysis of the data mainly quantitative procedures were used. Results were summarized by frequency and cross tabulation procedures, followed by the calculation of the Pearson coefficient of correlation, and t-test of significance of correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show that out of the 200 academic underachievers identified as having no apparent limitations to justify their poor performance, majority of them were boys (60.5%) as compared to girls (39.5%). Further it was also found that the incidence of underachievement increased as the class level increased. 41.5% of the cases were located in class 6th, 32% in class 5th and only 26.5% cases were found in class 4th. All the children were found to have average I.Q level (as indicated by the use of Intelligence test) but yet these children had constantly been unable to perform satisfactorily at school, scoring below 40% marks in the past three annual examinations.

Parent Child Interaction Scale: Analysis of the responses obtained on the scale reveals that on a whole almost half, 49% of the parents scored average on the parent-child interaction index. Almost equal number of parents, 28% and 23% scored low and high respectively on this scale. Most of the parents made it a point to spend time with their children and to take interest in their studies, but at the same time many of them, reported that because of the time constraint it was not always possible to do so (Table 1).

Category wise breakup reveals that majority of the parents scored moderately on the dimensions of family activities involving the children (56%), parental willingness to devote time to children (43%) and sharing personal feelings and experiences (61%). On the other hand, larger number of parents, 46.5%, scored high only on the dimension related to rewarding/punishing the children for learning. The common rewards included verbal praises and physical stuff such as clothes, toys and sweets. The modes of punishment included verbal sarcasm, mild physical beating, and deprivation in form of not taking for outings, not letting watch television, not buying gifts. Parents provided either low (42%) or moderate (46%) guidance to their children for academic achievement. As reported by the parents though they tried to pay attention towards the academics but often could not spend much time with them. On the dimension of verbal pattern most of the parents either scored low (48%) or moderate (34%). Most parents reported that they had adequate arrangements of books and magazines at home and encouraged the children to read the same, but rarely tried to explain meaning of words or formation of grammatically correct sentences.

Table 1: Parent child interaction scale

Dimension	Academic underachievers							
	Low		Mod.		High		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Verbal pattern of the home	96	48	68	34	36	18	200	100
2. Parental guidance by way of academic guidance or achievement press	84	42	92	46	24	12	200	100
3. Activities of the family involving the child	38	19	112	56	50	25	200	100
4. Parental willingness to devote time to the child	53	26.5	86	43	61	30.5	200	100
5. Sharing of personal feelings and experiences	58	29	122	61	20	10	200	100
6. Parental use of rewards or punishment for learning	48	24	59	29.5	93	46.5	200	100

Relation of Academic Learning with Parent Child Interaction: The scores obtained by the sample children in the three academic areas (reading, spelling and mathematics) were clubbed together and represented their academic learning. Then, these scores were correlated with the scores obtained by their parents on the Parent-Child Interaction Scale (Table 2). The results reveal that there exists a significant positive correlation between the two variable ($r=0.314$, $p<0.05$). This implies that higher the nature of interaction between the parents and their children, higher would be the academic performance of their children. When each of the three academic areas were correlated individually with the scores obtained on the scale it was found that all the academic areas shared a positive significant correlation with the Parent-Child Interaction. These correlations were highest for reading ($r = 0.247$, $p<0.05$), followed by spelling ($r = 0.219$, $p<0.05$) and mathematics ($r = 0.201$, $p<0.05$). This shows that the different academic areas are also related to the nature of interaction that exists between

the parents and children. Similar results were found in the work of Gill and Sidhu (1988), which reported that classroom scores were low where there is low parental motivation and sharing of parental work with the children. Shivrathnamma (1981) and Siddiqui et al. (1983) also indicated the role of motivation from the parents and favorable parental responses to encourage achievement among the children. Thus, the academic performance of the children can be improved with parental support.

Attitude of Teachers: On the basis of the results obtained it was found that fifty six percent of the teachers had favourable attitude towards the teaching profession (Table 3). These teachers showed satisfaction over their jobs and considered teaching as a noble profession. They reported that the students gave them lot of respect and that it was a good / positive experience to teach children. Apart from this they also felt that this was a less time consuming profession and afforded them enough time to be with their respective families. Sixteen of the teachers had

Table 2: Parent-child interaction and academic learning

Category	Correlation	r
Academic Underachievers	Parent-Child Interaction-Academic Learning	0.314*
	Parent-Child Interaction-Reading	0.247*
	Parent-Child Interaction-Spelling	0.219*
	Parent-Child Interaction-Mathematics	0.201*

* $p<0.05$

neutral attitude as they felt that like other professions, teaching, also had its advantages and drawbacks. However, some of them were unsatisfied with their jobs. They lamented regarding the salary they were paid. These teachers were of the view that in our country and especially the state, teachers were a neglected lot and added that if more opportunities were not provided to them, then they would opt for some other jobs.

Only fifty four percent of the teachers were satisfied with the administrative setup under which they worked. They had no complaints regarding the treatment meted out to them by the school authorities. But, at the same time twenty one percent of them disapproved of the terms and conditions laid by the authorities. They felt that the school administration should be more sympathetic towards their staff. Some teachers (25%) showed neutral attitude because they reasoned out that in other professions also the employees have to face the negligent attitude of the employers.

Sixty four percent of the teachers showed satisfaction with the teaching practices adopted by the schools. These teachers were against any major change in the education system. On the other hand, a few teachers acknowledged that the teaching practices had some flaws but at the same time they felt that these were nothing serious. Only 10% of the teachers felt that some change could be brought about in the teaching process as well as in the examination system. It was found that the younger teachers were mostly in favour of some change, while the senior teachers showed contentment with the teaching system.

Also, almost half of them (45%) were satisfied with the facilities that were offered at their school to the children. They felt that the schools are generally equipped with all modern day facilities. A small percentage showed unfavourable attitude towards the facilities available. The areas where some improvements were suggested included

larger rooms; bigger play fields, library facilities and recreational facilities.

Although all the teachers reported that they paid attention to the needs of the children and tried their best to make learning easy for the children, however, some of them acknowledge that because of large teacher –child ratio it was not possible to pay individual attention to all the children. They felt that good teacher- child relationship was essential for a good learning environment. Only a small fraction (17%) of teachers held favorable attitude towards under-achievers. In most of the cases the teachers put the blame of poor performance of the children or their parents. According to them, some children do not pay attention in the class because they basically don't want to study and that it was primarily the fault of the parents and the children themselves. Most, forty nine percent of the teachers complained regarding the habit of some children of not doing their homework. They reported that they needed to remain strict with the children if the children had to work on time. Around thirty four percent of them showed neutral attitude, meaning that they tried to reason out their performance and were not strict or too harsh towards them, and felt that these children should be treated just like other children in the class.

Relationship of Academic Learning with Attitude of Teachers: The scores obtained by the 200 academic underachievers in the three academic areas namely, reading, spelling and mathematics were clubbed together to form an index of their academic learning and were correlated to the attitude of their teacher (Table 4). The results reveal that there existed a positive significant correlation between academic learning and three areas, namely- the attitude of the teacher towards teaching profession ($r = 0.264$, $p < 0.01$), towards facilities offered at school ($r = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$) and towards academic underachievers ($r = 0.257$, $p < 0.01$). However, the attitude of the teachers towards school administration and

Table 3: Attitude of teachers

Dimensions	Favourable		Neutral		Unfavourable	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Attitude towards Teaching profession	106	56	30	16	53	28
2. Attitude towards school administration	102	54	47	25	40	21
3. Attitude towards teaching profession	121	64	49	26	19	10
4. Attitude towards Facilities offered	85	45	79	42	25	13
5. Attitude towards Academic underachievers	32	17	64	34	93	49

Table 4: Correlation of attitude of teachers and academic learning

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Correlation</i>
1. Attitude Towards Teaching Profession and Academic Learning	0.264**
2. Attitude Towards School Administration and Academic Learning	0.097
3. Attitude Towards Teaching Practices and Academic Learning	0.113
4. Attitude Towards Facilities Offered and Academic Learning	0.183*
5. Attitude Towards Academic Underachievers and Academic Learning	0.257**

*p<0.05

**p<0.01

teaching practices was insignificantly correlated with the academic performance. This implies that some attitudes held by the teachers have significant influence on the student's academic performance. The better their attitude towards their teaching profession, the underachievers and the facilities offered at school better the performance of the children. The teachers who had more favorable attitude towards their profession probably were more ready for the challenges associated with their jobs and they were probably happier in dealing with the children. Similarly, good and sympathetic attitude towards the underachievers was found to help them in their school related work. Also, since teachers dealt with the children on an every day basis they were more aware of the requirements of the children in terms of the physical facilities and this is what gets reflected in the results, as this attitude was associated significantly with the learning of the children.

On the whole, it can be said that the attitude of the teachers play a significant role in their performance and hence on the learning of the children. These findings are similar to those of Thiagarajan et al. (1995) who found significant correlation between teachers attitudes and academic achievement of the children. Similarly, Gyanani and Agarwal (1998) found that classroom climate, teachers behaviour and attitudes account for variations in the academic achievement of the pupils.

CONCLUSION

Overall the results show that on the parent-child interaction most of the parents scored average. Even category-wise also most parents scored moderately. All parents wanted to spend time with their children and took interest in their

activities. The parents show concern towards their children, as they seem to be their priority. On the other hand, majority of the teachers held favorable attitude towards teaching profession, school administration, and teaching practices. But most of them held unfavorable attitude towards academic underachievers.

The importance of both good parental interaction and attitudes of the teachers for the academic performance of children is apparent from the results obtained. All children need to have healthy interaction with their parents and teachers. It is time that we view the role of parents and teacher as complimentary and not as supplementary. They both need to work in coordination and synchronization with one another. It is suggested that some parental awareness programmes should be run either by the schools or by some other agencies that would inform them about the need of having a good home environment. The parents should be involved in the everyday activities of the children and there should be free exchange of thoughts and ideas between them. Also, due care has to be taken at the time of recruiting teachers in the schools. Those teachers who have more favorable attitude towards teaching profession and towards children in general should be preferred. Some pre-service and in-service training should be provided to the teachers to sensitize them towards the needs of the children.

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