

Full Length Research Paper

Study-orientation of high and low academic achievers at secondary level in Pakistan

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Accepted 24 March, 2009

The study orientation of low and high academic achievers was compared, measured through a self-developed study orientation scale (SOS) primarily based on 47 items comparing study habits and attitude. Students' marks obtained in the 10th grade Examination determined the measure of academic performance. The analysis revealed that the high achievers had better study orientation, study habits and attitude, than the low achievers. There was no significant difference between the study orientations of male and female students but the rural students differed significantly from urban students on study orientation.

Key words: Study orientation, study habits and attitude, high academic achievers, and low academic achievers, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Little study has been done looking at the learning habits and attitudes to learning of students at any level of the education system in Pakistan. This study is an attempt to start to fill that gap. Because of the dearth of previous studies much of the literature informing the research is based on other (mainly Western) work. Whilst much of this might well be applicable internationally, care needs to be taken in assuming that all of it is directly applicable to the Pakistani context. Hopefully studies such as this one will begin the process of developing a contextually appropriate literature.

Good students learn facts and skills by which they organize and express their thoughts and talents. It is true that we are all born with the ability to learn. We do it every day of our lives, often without being aware of it. However, studying is a special form of learning; it is achieved with some specific purpose in mind. All of us need to learn how to study (Lalitha, 2000; Landsberger, 2005; Rowntree, 1988; Sarwar, 1991). If we are to do best we can, as a student, we need to understand what would we want out of studying and what learning means to us.

Poor study method clearly disrupt the progress of stu-

dents (Rowntree, 1983). A study by Nagaraju (2004) found that students in Secondary Schools in India usually do not devote sufficient time to their studies and seldom have proper study habits. Underachievers have many non-productive study habits (Gibson, n.d). Students' study habits seem to show differences in how they learn and how serious they are about learning (Young, 1998).

There are a number of study methods identified as being helpful in the literature. Landsberger (2005) gave a list of keys to academic success: they are; taking responsibility, putting things in proper order, discovering one's key productivity periods and places, prioritising productivity periods and places for the most difficult study challenges, considering oneself in a win-win situation, consulting with the teacher, and continuously challenge oneself.

A good student must draw up a timetable for study. This timetable should ideally indicate day, time and subjects to be studied. Such timetables are positively beneficial because they enable a learner to organize his study effectively. This takes a load off the learners' shoulders, enabling concentration on only one task at a time (Rowntree, 1983).

Race (1986) advises students to do a bit of studying whenever they can. He believes that a number of short

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bursts of activity tend to work better than a few long ones. It is better for students to study in the morning while their concentration is at peak and students should study their toughest subjects when they feel at their ease. It should be remembered however that each learner is different, so he should develop his own methods and preferences.

Seebach (2006) suggests a study break (not a relaxation break) after every 15 to 20 min in which to recall what has been studied. Some time spent on rest and relaxation may actually save time in the long-run (LaBine, 1999). Breaks are an important part of study and students should show them on the timetable. It is difficult for most people to work for more than three hours without a break and if a learner persists in doing this, he is likely to find himself involved in ineffective cramming sessions (Freeman, 1982).

The making and organisation of a study plan is a major factor in accelerating the academic progress of students. Lalitha (2000) describes that studying is essentially hard work and concludes that students who are not prepared to make appropriate efforts are wasting their time. Rote memorization does not bring about sustained learning and to be a good learner the student must plan his study time and spread it over a period. This conclusion has implications for educational systems that encourage strategic rote learning in students by basing their assessment methodology entirely on high stakes one off testing and exams.

Time management skills are essential for successful students. A key to academic survival and success in the classroom is efficient use of time outside the classroom (Battles, 1999). Time management is a skill few people master, but it is one that most people need (Treuer, 2006). Developing time management skills is a journey that needs practice and guidance (Landsberger, 2006).

The attitude towards study is one of the main factors which affect academic performance of learners. Numerous studies have reported a positive correlation between attitudes towards subject and achievement (Ma and Xu, 2004; Madeline, 1985; Maree, 1997). This has implications for teachers, who need to find ways of engaging the interests of students in their particular subjects.

Study attitude serves as an index of how we think and feel about study. Crow and Crow (1999) commented that learning experience shapes study attitude. Successful learners adopt positive study attitudes (Bokhari, 1996). Maree (1997) describes that study attitude is a driving force behind study habits and poor attitudes was a reason for pupils' underachievement in the author's study of learning in mathematics. Ma and Xu (2004), also exploring mathematics achievement, concluded that secondary-level students must have a positive attitude towards math in order to succeed. Lin et al. (2001) recommended that future researchers are encouraged to find out the interactions between students' performance and attitude. Made-line (1985) explored a correlation between mathematics achievement and attitude towards mathematics.

Sirohi (2004) concluded that 98.7% of the underachi-

vers tend to possess unfavourable attitude towards the teacher and 100% have poor study habits.

Students' performance in school is a topic of great concern to teachers, parents, and researchers. It puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers, schools, and the educational system in general (Padma, 2007). Achievement outcomes have been regarded as a function of two characteristics, "skill" and "will" and these must be considered separately because possessing the will alone may not ensure success if the skill is lacking (McCombs and Marzano, 1990). This is a reminder to the teaching profession that skills in study habits might need to be 'taught' just as subject matter needs to be taught.

This study seeks to explore the question of whether there is any impact of study habits and attitude on the academic achievement of a sample of secondary students in schools in Pakistan. We addressed the following three research questions

- i.) Is there any significant difference between study orientation of high and low academic achievers?
- ii.) Is there any significant difference between study orientation of female and male students?
- iii.) Is there any significant difference between study orientation of rural and urban students?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 224 secondary school students among whom 112 were high achievers and 112 were low achievers. The students getting more than 60% marks were taken as high achievers and the students getting less than 45% marks were taken as low achievers. For sampling, the population was divided into eight strata. They were rural high achiever girls, urban high achiever girls, rural high achiever boys, urban high achiever boys, rural low achiever girls, urban low achiever girls, rural low achiever boys, and urban low achiever boys. Twenty eight pupils were randomly selected from each stratum.

A study orientation (study habits and attitude) questionnaire was developed on the lines of Brown and Holtzman (1967), Ansari (1983) and Ansari and Chowdhri (1990), and keeping in view its relevance and suitability for Pakistani students and their practices in Pakistani educational institutions. The final questionnaire contained 47 items and was divided into the following sub-categories; delay avoidance (08), study method (13), attitude towards teacher (10) and attitude towards education (16). Delay avoidance is a degree to which a student avoids procrastination and acts promptly. Work Methods is a measure of effective use of study skills. Attitude towards teacher (teacher approval) is the measure of feeling and opinion of students about teachers' classroom behavior. Attitude towards study (Educational Acceptance) is the measure of feeling and opinion of students about educational objectives, practices, and requirements (Hurlburt et al., 1991).

Study Habits is a combined score of the Delay Avoidance and Work Methods scales. Study Attitude is a combination of the scores of the Attitude towards teacher (Teacher Approval) and Attitude towards education (Educational Acceptance) scales. Study Orientation is an overall measure of a student's study habits and attitude. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the study orientation scale is 0.94, whereas for subcategories it ranges from 0.80 to 0.90.

Table 1. Study orientation of high and low academic achievers.

| S. No | Category | High Achievers n = 112 | | Low Achievers n = 112 | | t-value | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------|--------------------|
| | | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| | | 1 | Study orientation | 189.94 | 21.14 | | |
| 2 | Study Habits | 82.50 | 10.31 | 67.99 | 15.61 | 8.21 | 0.000 |
| 3 | Study attitude | 107.43 | 12.92 | 90.50 | 17.22 | 8.32 | 0.000 |
| 4 | Delay Avoidance | 33.93 | 4.08 | 27.32 | 7.23 | 8.42 | 0.000 |
| 5 | Work Method | 48.58 | 7.43 | 40.67 | 9.10 | 7.12 | 0.000 |
| 6 | Attitude Towards Teacher | 41.11 | 6.49 | 35.86 | 8.70 | 5.12 | 0.000 |
| 7 | Attitude towards Education | 66.32 | 8.10 | 54.64 | 11.49 | 8.79 | 0.000 |

Table 2. Study orientation of girls and boys.

| S. No | Category | Girls n = 112 | | Boys n = 112 | | t-test | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------|--------|--------------------|
| | | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| | | 1 | Study orientation (SO) | 177.13 | 28.10 | | |
| 2 | Study Habits (SH) | 77.11 | 14.01 | 73.39 | 15.45 | 1.88 | 0.061 |
| 3 | Study attitude (SA) | 100.02 | 16.04 | 97.90 | 18.68 | 0.91 | 0.362 |
| 4 | Delay Avoidance (DA) | 31.90 | 5.92 | 29.35 | 6.79 | 2.98 | 0.003 |
| 5 | Work Method (WM) | 45.21 | 9.12 | 44.04 | 9.26 | 0.95 | 0.338 |
| 6 | Attitude Towards Teacher (AT) | 38.90 | 7.35 | 38.06 | 8.80 | 0.77 | 0.439 |
| 7 | Attitude towards Education (AE) | 61.12 | 11.26 | 59.84 | 11.78 | 0.83 | 0.405 |

Table 3. Study orientation of rural and urban students.

| S. No | Category | Rural n = 112 | | Urban n = 112 | | t-test | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------|--------|--------------------|
| | | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| | | 1 | Study orientation | 179.64 | 27.64 | | |
| 2 | Study Habits | 78.39 | 13.35 | 72.11 | 15.28 | 3.28 | .001 |
| 3 | Study attitude | 101.24 | 16.37 | 96.69 | 18.16 | 1.97 | .050 |
| 4 | Delay Avoidance | 32.20 | 5.64 | 29.04 | 6.57 | 3.68 | .000 |
| 5 | Work Method | 46.18 | 8.59 | 43.06 | 9.53 | 2.57 | .011 |
| 6 | Attitude Towards Teacher | 39.17 | 8.11 | 37.79 | 8.06 | 1.27 | .205 |
| 7 | Attitude towards Education | 62.07 | 10.99 | 58.89 | 11.85 | 2.8 | .039 |

RESULTS

The Table1 compares the means and standard deviations of high and low academic achievers on study orientation.

The above results show that the means of high and low academic achievers on study orientation are significantly different $t = 9.02$, $df = 220$, and $p < 0.000$. This shows that the students who have better score on study orientation tend to have better academic achievement. This difference is highly significant on subcategories: study habits, study attitude, delay avoidance, work method, atti-

tude towards teacher and attitude towards education as depicted in the Table 1.

The Table 2 shows that the difference between boys and girls are non-significant at 0.05 levels of confidence on all categories except delay avoidance. These results are different from American National Freshman Attitudes Report, 2007 which shows males more confident than females but lagging in study habits, enjoyment of reading, and motivation to succeed.

The Table 3 shows that the difference between rural and urban students is significant on study orientation, study habits, delay avoidance, work method and attitude

towards education in favour of rural students. These results are different from (American National Freshman Attitudes Report, 2007) which shows that there is no difference in study habits, study orientation, delay avoidance, work method and attitude towards education.

DISCUSSION

The study shows that high achievers have better study habits and attitude as compared to low achievers. Similar results have been described by Chaudhry (1965), Bokhari (1966), Ansari (1983) and Ansari and Chaudhry (1990). The study reveals that the high achievers revise daily what they learn in the class on that day. High Achievers study according to a timetable. The high achievers as a group report to be more effortful and vigorous; they say that they try to understand things rather than memorize them and they report being more calm and efficient as compared to low achievers. For instance, even when studying difficult lessons, they do not feel tired easily when they are studying; they readily ask the teacher to explain when they do not understand the lesson. They also report that they are usually not nervous during the exam. The high achievers also find their school subjects relevant. In terms of attitude towards teachers, school and education in general, high achievers again differ from the low achievers. The high achievers generally have a positive attitude towards teachers, feel interested in the subjects taught, believe that their studies have practical relevance for their lives and think that their achievement is the outcome of their effort. For instance, as compared to low achievers, the high achievers more often say that their teachers are competent, impartial, and interested in their duties. The high achievers also find their school subjects relevant. Another important area of difference between the two groups is in terms of attribution of achievement. The high achievers generally report that they obtain marks that they deserve on the basis of their work; and not due to some other reasons.

Conclusion

It is concluded that study orientation (study habits and attitude) is significantly related with academic performance of students and there is no significant difference in the study orientation of male and female students. However, there is significant difference in the study orientation of urban and rural students.

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