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A Study of Impact of School Environment on Academic Stress among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Every child is born with certain natural and inherited endowments. These endowments are modified and sublimated for making the individual child a useful member of society. A teacher has to deal with the child all along the class hour. Unless he/she thoroughly understands the natural inclination of the child, his/her heredity, environment, desires, aptitude, habits, likes and dislikes he/she cannot succeed in imparting good education. This article is an excerpt from the researcher's doctoral thesis which is related to school environment and academic stress as perceived by underachievers in science. The rationale for the study was to identify the underachievers in science and to find out the ways through which their level of achievement in science can be improved. Underachievers generally reflect discrepancy between potential and performance. The study was carried out on 400 underachievers in science of 9th standard students studying in secondary schools located at Faridabad district of Haryana. After selecting the underachievers in science the school environment as they perceived and academic stress among them were studied. The findings of the study show that there is significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of the underachievers of class IX students studying in government and government-aided schools.

Key Terms Used in the Study: School Environment, Academic Stress, underachievers.

Introduction: Every individual child is a creature of the culture of his/her community or society. His/her personality to a great extent is a product of the cultural influences that his/her society brings to bear upon him. Famous American educational sociologist, George Payne, said "The development of human personality or modification of human behaviour, which is the main aim of education, can be understood better if one knows the sociological forces that have had their pressure on human individuals" (Safaya, 1963). Academic achievement of students in school is related to students background factors, teachers professional characteristics, school environment etc. these categories are related to each other, as well as to student achievement reflecting interdependencies among social factors.

Furthermore, the category of organizational features is defined to focus on particular factors that correlate with the level of student achievement. The general correlation of the organization of a school with academic performance can be partitioned into factors of school size, average class size, normative cohesion of the staff, and teachers' sense of control in school affairs.

School environment and many academic tasks pose serious threats for students' personal well being. When there is stress, which students cannot cope with, the teacher must try to remove it or reduce it. Excessive stress is not good for physical and mental health of an individual. Gradually students learn to deal with stressors of many kinds which are inevitable in their lives. Consequently, students learn to cope with stress.

School Environment: School is the second most impressionable sphere of influence after home that provides an enormous area of interaction in which personality is vividly expressed and shaped. A child's school experience exerts a potent influence on his developing personality patterns. The school shares with the home the responsibility of helping a young person to achieve those behaviour characteristics that can ensure for him the making of satisfactory adjustment to the demands on him of the various areas of his present and future life activities. No matter how well the school is organized, personal problems will arise as individual student attempts to adjust to the school life. School plays an important role in moulding the personality of children. In school children learn the process of liking and disliking, conforming and rebelling, acquiring a conception of the world and themselves. Here the teacher substitutes the parents. His behaviour plays significant role for the child's development. In schools children need to feel that each one of them, their homes, communities, language and cultures, are valuable and their diverse capabilities are accepted. All of them have the ability and the right to learn and to access knowledge and skills. So, school has a great role to play towards overall achievement of the individual and to reduce stress among students.

School environment and classroom climate plays a very significant role in reducing or compounding the academic stress and anxiety among students in many cases stressed and anxious individuals often have difficulty in setting realistic goals and making wise choices. They tend to select either extremely difficult or extremely easy tasks. In the first case, they are likely to fail which will increase their sense of hopelessness. In the second case they will probably succeed but miss the sense of satisfaction. Anxious and stressed students may need deal of guidance in choosing both short term and long term goals. Anita Woolfolk in her book 'Educational Psychology' (1995) suggests certain measures that can be used by the school to deal with students who are highly anxious or stressed. A brief outlining of that is given below.

- i. Use competition carefully.
- ii. Avoid situations in which highly anxious students will have to perform in front of large groups.
- iii. Make sure all instructions are clear.

- iv. Avoid unnecessary time pressures.
- v. Remove some of the pressures from major tests and exams.
- vi. Develop alternatives to written tests.

National Curriculum Framework (2005) says, “Children’s voices and experiences do not find expression in the classroom – often the only voice heard is that of the teacher. When children speak they are usually only answering the teacher’s questions or repeating the teacher’s words. They rarely do things, nor do they have opportunities to take initiative. Children will learn only in an atmosphere where they feel they are valued. Our schools still do not convey this to all children. The association of learning with fear, discipline and stress, rather than enjoyment and satisfaction is detrimental to learning. Our children need to feel that each one of them, their homes, communities, language and cultures, are valuable: that their diverse capabilities are accepted; that all of them have the ability and the right to learn and to access knowledge and skills; and that adult society regards them as capable of the best”. So, school has a great role to play towards overall achievement of the individual.

A child’s school experience exerts a potent influence on his developing personality patterns. The school shares with the home the responsibility of helping a young person to achieve those behaviour characteristic that can ensure for him the making satisfactory adjustment to the demands on him of the various areas of his present and future life activities. No matter how well the school is organized, personal problems will arise as individual student attempts to adjust the school life.

Academic Stress: Stress refers to ‘a state of the organism resulting from some interaction with the environment, especially, when there exists imbalance between demands and resources’ (Lazaraus and Folkman, 1984). Academic stress refers to the feeling that students experience from the demands of education and school system. It refers to the unpleasant emotions such as anger, tension, depression and nervousness of the students resulting from the environment which are concerned with their school and education. Academic stress are caused partly or fully by school and academic factors such as examinations, competitions, teaching process, teachers behavior, classroom condition, and general school environment and many more factors.

Academic Stress in a more simpler way may be defined as an internal state of an individual evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding one’s resources for coping caused partially or fully by school and academic factors such as examinations, competitions, teaching process, teachers behaviour, classroom condition and general school environment.

According to **Gupta and Khan (1987)** Academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustrations associated with academic failure or even a fear of the possibility of such failure.

According to **Shah, M.L. (1988)** in the context of school, academic stress means a pervasive urgency to learn all those things, which are related or prescribed by the school.

According to **Edmunds (1984)**, “Academic stress is an important factor like writing term papers, test anxiety, poor study skills, excessive academic load, which forms a major part of general stress among adolescent students. “The term stress has come into wide use in behavioural studies only within the past two decades. But in this relatively short time it has all but pre-empted a field previously shared by a number of other concepts like anxiety, frustration, conflicts etc. In general term stress is a reaction to an event. It can only be sensibly defined as perceptual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on the person and his ability to cope with it.

Given below are few stressors that often students perceive to pose serious threats to them.

- (a) **Exam Anxiety:** For most of the students examinations are a source of inordinate stress. It can be very debilitating mentally.
- (b) **Success versus Failure:** In most academic settings, the obvious solution to problems of how to get students of all level of ability to realize more of their potentiality for learning is that of increasing academic pressure on them.
- (c) **Personality:** Personality seems to be related to one’s ability to tolerate stress. One of the personality variables found to be a contributor to significant variance in individual difference in stress.
- (d) **Competition:** One of the conditions in modern life that aggravates and intensifies anxiety and stress is competition. Competition is the striving on the part of two or more persons for the same object especially for the goal of being superior.

Need and Significance of the Study: School environment and academic stress play a significant role in students’ academic achievement. So, there is need to conduct a study of impact of school environment on academic stress among secondary school students. The investigator based on his observation found that a vast majority of students particularly adolescents are living under high level of academic stress. There is a rising trend of suicidal tendency among students all over the country. According to an estimate annually four thousand students are committing suicide. A youngster in 12-25 years commits suicide every week. Of these academic and exam stress acts as main trigger in about 75% cases. (T.O.I. September 16, 2006). Experts claim that in over 80% cases behind such a high level of stress, anxiety and depression that may lead to suicide among teenagers is because of failure in personal relationships.

National Curriculum Framework 2005, realizing this fact states. “The increasing competitive into which schools are being drawn and the aspirations of parents places a tremendous burden of stress and anxiety on all children, including the very young, to the detriment of their personal growth and development and inculcating in them the joy of learning.”

The school needs to send out a strong signal into the community of parents who pressurize children from an early age to be perfectionists. Instead of spending time in tuitions or at home to learn the 'perfect answers', parents need to encourage their children to spend their time reading story books, playing, doing reasonable amount of homework and revision. Instead of looking for courses on stress management need to distress their curricula, and advise parents to distress children's life outside the school. (National Curriculum Framework, 2005)

Underachievement is concerned with an inability or failure to perform appropriately for one's age or talents. It may be defined as an unfulfilled potential. If the students achieve below their potential in science subject, this is called as underachievement in science. More precisely, all those students who scored at least one standard less marks in achievement test in science in comparison to the marks obtained in intelligence test were considered as underachievers in science. Various factors such as Lack of motivation, Parental influence, Lack of nurturing of intellectual potential, Conflict of values Disabilities or poor health condition, Brain damage, cerebral dysfunction or impairment etc. can be the causes of underachievement.

The present study reveals some interesting results in finding the relationships between school environment and academic stress of secondary school students. The results of the study will be helpful to the teachers, parents, school administrators, researchers and policy making bodies redesigning the process and products in improving the overall performance of the students particularly the overall performance of underachievers. Taking into consideration the above observations, the investigator felt it necessary to look into the school environment and its relationship with academic stress among the students.

Statement of the Problem: The title of the study is given as “**A Study of Impact of School Environment on Academic Stress among Secondary School Students**”

Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To study the school environment of the students studying in secondary school of Faridabad.
- 2) To study the academic stress among the students studying in secondary schools of Faridabad.
- 3) To study the relationship between school environment and academic stress among the students studying in secondary schools of Faridabad.

Hypothesis:

- 1) There is no significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of the students studying in government secondary schools of Faridabad.
- 2) There is no significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of the students studying in government-aided secondary schools of Faridabad.
- 3) There is no significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of the students studying in secondary schools of Faridabad.

Methodology: The present research work was a descriptive and correlational in nature. It is concerned with functional relationship between two or more variables. The expectation from correlational research is that if a variable is found to be systematically associated with another variable, one can predict the future phenomena. The results may suggest additional and competing hypotheses to be tested. The variables involved in the study were school environment and academic stress. The investigator tried to find out the correlation among these two variables.

Population: The population for the present study comprised of class 9th students of government and government –aided secondary schools of Faridabad district.

Sample: Random sampling technique was used for the selection of 400 underachievers in science of class 9th as a sample from government and government-aided secondary schools located at Faridabad district of Haryana.

Tools Used: The investigator used following tools to collect the data for the present study.

1. School Environment Inventory (SEI) developed by K.S.Mishra (2002).
2. The scale for Assessing Academic Stress (SAAS) developed by Uday Kumar Sinha, Vibha Sharma and Mahender K. Nepal (2002).

Analysis and Interpretation of Data: The investigator collected the required data with the help of tools mentioned above by visiting selected schools Prior permission of the principals of the selected schools were obtained and schedule of administering the test was fixed with them. Mean and standard deviation of the data of the respondents were calculated to study the school environment and level of academic stress among government and government-aided schools. Coefficients of correlations were also calculated to study the degree of relationship between two variables.

Correlation between school environment and academic stress of government school students: Table-1 shows correlation between school environment and academic stress of government secondary school students.

Table-1: Correlation between School Environment and Academic Stress of Government Secondary School Students				
S.N	Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient	Remarks
1.	School Environment	400	0.762	Significant
2.	Academic stress	400		

The co-efficient of correlation between school environment and academic stress of government secondary school students was found to be 0.762, which is significant at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Therefore, it is concluded that there is significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of government secondary school students.

Correlation between school environment and academic stress of government-aided school students: Table-2 shows coefficient of correlation between school environment and academic stress of government-aided secondary school students.

Table-2: Correlation between School Environment and Academic Stress of Government-Aided Secondary School Students				
S.N	Variables	N	Correlation Coefficient	Remarks
1.	School Environment	400	0.792	Significant
2.	Academic stress	400		

The coefficient of correlation between school environment and academic stress of government-aided secondary school students was calculated to be 0.792 which is significant at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. So, there exists significant correlation between school environment and academic stress of government-aided secondary school students.

Delimitation of the Study:

The study was delimited to:

- 1) 400 students of class 9th who were underachievers in science.
- 2) Secondary schools located at Faridabad district of Haryana.
- 3) Both boys and girls of government and government-aided secondary schools.

Main Findings of the Study:

The important findings that have emerged out after analysis and interpretation of data are given below:

- The students of Government -aided secondary schools showed little higher creative stimulating school environment where conditions and opportunities to stimulate creative thinking in schools were found to be better than the school environment of government secondary schools.
- Both the students of government and government -aided secondary schools were found to be at the same level of academic stress.
- Overall students of Govt. Aided Schools showed significantly high level of cognitive encouraging environment as compared to Government School students.
- A positive and significant correlation was found between school environment and academic stress of secondary school students.

Conclusion: There exists a positive correlation between school environment and academic stress of secondary school students. Students look for freedom, identity, autonomy and connectivity which they can get in amiable school environment. Academic stress arouse due to teacher behaviour, class condition, anger, tension and depression etc. A significant correlation was found between school environment and academic stress of secondary school students. Thus school environment affects academic stress and hence the academic achievement of students. It means better the school environment better the academic

achievement. High comprehensive stress may be the cause of underachievement. Therefore the teachers should try to maintain stress free school environment.

Educational Implications: A poor school environment leads to academic underachievement. School authorities should provide better school environment in order to increase student's academic achievement up to their potential. The school authorities and the teachers should provide effective and creative school environment in order to help the learners in developing experimentation skills, note-taking, concentration, memorization, group discussion and learning by doing skills. Teachers and parents should give utmost care in dealing with the children positively so as to reduce stress among them. A carefully organized programme of guidance and counselling should be made available to all students especially for the highly stressed. The following educational implications may be suggested based on the results obtained in this study.

1. Provide congenial school environment.
2. Provide students healthy emotional classroom climate in schools.
3. Teachers are suggested to have warm relationship with students in schools.
4. Teachers are suggested to bringing examination reforms into practice.
5. Teachers are suggested promoting guidance and counselling services into schools.
6. Teachers and learners must have clear understanding of educational objectives at school level. Teachers must give priority for the development of required objectives in their learners.

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