

Analysis of causal factors for academic backwardness of rural school children

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The study examined the causal factors related to academic backwardness in school going children. The sample comprised of 211 academically backward children studying in 7th, 8th and 9th standards (13-14 years) from four villages of Dharwad. The identification of academically backward children was made based on two criteria that is academic performance of the children in the previous year (those who secure 'C' grade and attending remedial classes) and opinion of their respective class teachers. Self structured tool was used to identify the reasons behind academic backwardness of children. The results revealed that the academic backwardness among children were related to academic, familial and health aspects. However 70 per cent of children had problems related to academic aspect that is difficulty in understanding few subjects, problems in writing and answering questions during exam. About 25 per cent had problems related familial aspects such as lack of education of parents, lack of co-operation and involvement in the studies by family members. Further health factors such as feeling tired, often headache, and difficulty in hearing were the major causal factors for academic backwardness in children. Hence, it is concluded that multiple factors were responsible for academic backwardness among rural school children which needs attention by the parents and teachers.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Academic backwardness, Causal factors, Grade

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Education is a unique investment and academic achievement is a vital aspect of it. In the yester years, education was primarily for learning. But today the main purpose of education is for earning (Bhatti, 2005). In this world of industrialization and globalization, education has become highly commercial and academic excellence has gained through tough competitions. The educational status of an individual is highly depicted through the academic achievement. Academic achievement is considered as a key to judge one's

potentialities and capacities. Hence, educators give paramount credence to the intellectual attainment of the child in the form of grades and scorings and had equated education to the age old idea of imparting knowledge to the disciples.

Academic backwardness is one of the commonest educational problems encountered in rural children and consists of the fact that the child's performance at school falls below the expectations *i.e.* according to the level of intelligence. Academic backwardness of children is a

big concern among parents and teachers in present day competitive society (Sabitu and Nuradeen, 2010). Academic backwardness has a lifelong impact on the child and adolescent, affecting school completion, higher education, interpersonal relationships, prospects for employment, marriage etc. It is reported that around 20 per cent of school children have scholastic backwardness and meanwhile children are identified much later and as a result, optimum benefit of remedial education is not obtained. Academically backward children are very backward in normal curriculum, because of retarded milestones which may or may not be accompanied by additional handicaps, such as physical deficiencies, ill health, limited verbal expressions and emotional disturbances. Because of all these factors, they are in need of special curriculum and specially trained teachers for those who have specific handicaps, slow learners and are those who have limited cognitive abilities. The causes of their failure range from specific perceptual difficulties to emotional maladjustments. These are students who need some kind of special or remedial teaching to make a marked progress.

Low achievement is defined as a discrepancy between the child's actual ability and achievement. It may be related to poor self concept, lack of family involvement and encouragement, damaging peer pressure, cultural deprivation, study skill deficiency, emotional problems, physical illness, lack of academic motivation or lack of interest in school subjects and curriculum. Absence from school, unfortunate personal circumstances and life events or inadequate environmental conditions further limit their progress. Failure to recognize problems and provide solutions are also reported to be contributory factors for their continuing backwardness. The low achiever differs from an average youngster in many, different ways. In very simple terms, such a child may have problems or concerns related to his own personality, study skills, lack of motivation, squabbles in family life or school related issues. A low achiever is thus thought to be one who is not able to exploit fully his or her innate capacities and does not register or show up educational success, commensurate with his or her abilities. This builds up stress and tension in the child. Much of his potentials may be burned up merely handling the stress. There could be internal stress, of not understanding his feelings; of wanting to present a more positive image of himself or

himself to his significant ones on one hand; and the external stress of peer pressure, criticism from the teachers etc on the other hand. This combination can wreak havoc on the child's performance. Therefore the present paper addresses reasons for academic backwardness among rural school children.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The population for the study was school going children from rural areas of Dharwad taluk. The sample comprised 211 academically backward children studying in 7th, 8th and 9th standards from four villages of Dharwad. The identification of academically backward children was made based on two criteria that is academic performance of the children in the previous year (those who secure 'C' grade and attending remedial classes) and opinion of the respective class teachers.

Tools used for the study:

Self structured checklist was used to assess the academic, familial and health reasons associated with academic underachievement of children. The checklist consisted 42 questions with two alternative responses namely 'yes' and 'no'.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data indicates that 82 per cent of the children were 13-14 years old and only 15 per cent of them were 14-15 years old. Among them majority of them were boys (73%) followed by girls (27%). About socio economic status, majority of children (89.6%) belonged to low followed by middle (10.4%) socio-economic status.

The academic reasons related to the backwardness of children (Table 1) revealed that about 70 per cent of the children expressed that, they have difficulty in understanding few school subjects, problems in writing and inability to answer all the questions in the exam. This might be due to poor understanding, perception, reasoning, remembering and recall of the subject leading to lower scholastic achievement among children. Because of retarded milestones which may or may not be accompanied by additional handicaps, such as physical deficiencies, ill health, limited verbal expressions and emotional disturbances may possibly contributing to the academic backwardness. This result is in line with study reported by Nair *et al.* (2003) wherein daily study patterns, poor study habits, family environment, education

Table 1 : Academic problems of academically backward children					(n=211)
Sr. No.	Academic reasons	Yes	%	No	%
1.	I don't understand what teachers teach in the class.	74	35.1	137	64.9
2.	I don't like few subjects that's why I am lagging behind.	113	53.6	98	46.4
3.	I feel that some subjects are hard.	142	67.3	69	32.7
4.	Studies seem to be beyond to my capacities.	64	30.3	147	69.7
5.	I postpone studies for examination time.	80	37.9	131	62.1
6.	I feel that studies is burden.	51	24.2	160	75.8
7.	I am unable in continuing the tasks related to study.	56	26.5	155	73.5
8.	I am unable to give answers to all questions in the exams.	121	57.3	90	42.7
9.	I write slowly.	131	62.1	80	37.9
10.	I am afraid of studies.	50	23.7	161	76.3
11.	I find teaching methods in class room are boring.	42	19.9	169	80.1
12.	School hours seem long to me.	43	20.4	168	79.6
13.	My written and oral language is not good.	82	38.9	129	61.1
14.	I feel difficulty to understand my teacher's language.	65	30.8	146	69.2
15.	My teacher's behavior seems to be bias.	42	19.9	169	80.1
16.	Behaviour of my classmates is not good with me.	37	17.5	174	82.5

Table 2 : Familial problems of academically backward children					(n=211)
Sr. No.	Familial reasons	Yes	%	No	%
1.	My home environment is not conducive for studies.	37	17.1	175	82.9
2.	My siblings disturb me in my studies.	28	13.3	183	86.7
3.	My family members engage me more in activities other than studies.	42	19.9	169	80.1
4.	I have to do other work due to financial constraints.	35	16.6	176	83.4
5.	Actually my parents don't want that I should continue my studies.	31	14.7	180	85.3
6.	My family occupation interrupts me 01 in my studies.	36	17.1	175	82.9
7.	Due to some family reasons I can't spare time for studies.	55	26.1	156	73.9
8.	There is no contribution of my family members in my studies.	52	24.6	159	75.4
9.	Due to lack of education, the expected co-operation from family members is lacking	71	33.6	140	66.4
10.	My studies are affected due to family disputes.	44	20.9	167	79.1
11.	I can't study because of ill health of family members.	32	15.2	179	84.8
12.	Proper facilities for studies are not available in my home.	41	19.4	170	80.6
13.	There is no inspiration and guidance in my home for studies.	44	20.9	167	79.1

Table 3 : Health problems of academically backward children					(n=211)
Sr. No.	Health reasons	Yes	%	No	%
1.	My frequent illness hinders my studies.	42	19.9	169	80.1
2.	Sufficient food is not available for me.	22	10.4	189	89.6
3.	Due to depression I am unable to study properly.	54	25.6	157	74.4
4.	As my school is far from my home so I get tired.	60	28.4	151	71.6
5.	Often I feel tired so I am unable to concentrate on my studies.	67	31.8	144	68.2
6.	My frequent absentia in school because of illness affects my studies.	50	23.7	161	76.3
7.	I frequently suffer from headache.	62	29.4	149	70.6
8.	I frequently suffer from stomach ache.	31	14.7	180	85.3
9.	I am unable to study properly because of vision problems.	26	12.3	185	87.7
10.	I feel physically weak which affects my studies.	26	12.3	185	87.7
11.	My studies are affected due to lack of concentration.	85	40.3	126	59.7
12.	My studies are affected because of my worries and restlessness.	48	22.7	163	77.3
13.	I am unable to hear properly in the class room.	59	28.0	152	72.0

status of parents, personal distractions and child attitude towards study were the predictors of poor scholastic performance.

Regarding the familial reasons of academic backwardness (Table 2) about 25 per cent of children perceived that due to lack of education of parents, the expected co-operation from family members were the major causal factors followed by low investment of time in studies and engagement of child in domestic activity, family disputes, lack of motivation and guidance by family members were found to be have major role in academic backwardness. The results are in similar with Snow *et al.* (2008) reported that lack of adequate facilities for studying in the home, adverse family situations, lack of encouragement from parents and unrealistic academic expectations by parents were the major causes for academic underachievement of children.

The health reasons for academic backwardness of children (Table 3) revealed that high percentage of children expressed lack of concentration, tiredness due to far distance of school, headache, difficulty in hearing were the perceived reasons of children for academic backwardness. The results is in support with study conducted by Saraswati *et al.* (2009) reported that study habits, health factors and the social influence affecting scholastic performance of children. Hence, a child in a good state of health will achieve better as compare to child who is not physically fit.

Conclusion:

Academic backwardness is one of the commonest educational problems encountered in rural children and also a big concern for parents and teachers in present day competitive society. Academic backwardness is the result of combination of academic, familial and health factors. These factors builds up stress and tension in the child and meanwhile the child's potentials may be burned up and leads to academic backwardness. Hence, early recognition and proper intervention at school and family level is most important

step which can bring a big difference in the child's academic performance.

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