

# Role of Counselling Interventions in enhancing Adolescent's Academic Achievement and mental health : Two Case Studies

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## ABSTRACT

*Parents and teachers along with school management are concerned with students' achievement more than ever before. This has resulted in additional stresses to students whose aim is not only to pass the exam but also to score A's all the time. Many times this results in finger pointing among the stake holders . This adversely affects what happens in the classrooms in the name of teaching and consequently student performance leaves much to be desired. The need of the hour is to pause and ponder over what needs to be done to set things right and doing it faster if we are sincere in our efforts to enhance students' mental health along with their academic achievement. Every one has a right to good education which implies that every student has the potential to learn and become a responsible citizen if given a conducive atmosphere. More research has been done with regards to identification of barriers to learning and little has been done on how to overcome those barriers. This paper seeks to identify intervention strategies that can be used to improve students' performance The two case studies presented here focus on investigating factors of leading learning difficulties in Academic achievement ( in terms of score in mathematics ), and developing strategies for improving the same for students with difficulty in doing so on their own. Two types of learning difficulties were identified: learned helplessness and defensive attribution . In the discussion it is amplified how students enhanced their learning capacity with the use of appropriate strategies in the interventions. And yes, intervention works.*

**Key words:** learning difficulties, learning attribution, learning method.

## 1.INTRODUCTION

There has been a plethora of research work on "learning difficulties" (Qian, 1996). However, most of the research is focused on the discussion of psychology of learning, which lacks a connection to concrete content in highlighting or enhancing academic achievement. Despite some scholars having mentioned that learning difficulty is a significant topic in the research field (Du, 2003; Tao, 2004), not many researches have focussed on the adolescent's mathematical issues in academics. In particular, not many research studies focus on effective strategies to improve struggling students in their mathematics learning processes which affect academic achievement.

## 2.CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the classroom learning situation, many factors contribute to good performance in learning which include among others ; hard work by students whereby they apply effective learning skills, and practicing / revising sincerely every topic learnt .There are many reasons which cause students to score low have poor academic performance. Each student faces a unique pattern of challenges. Hence it becomes necessary to frame proper strategies for them to apply for improving their learning

## 3.LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

According to Slavin (2003), learned helplessness is the expectation, based on experience, that one's actions will ultimately lead to failure. It is an internal factor and relates to student confidence. Sometimes, learned helplessness is also related to external factors. For example, some students lack help for learning the concepts of mathematics early in their academic life. They have not been able to do well because their efforts were not facilitated by some external supervision or intervention in terms of parents, sibling or relations. The chance academic success in the subject was attributed to the factor of luck. Otherwise, failures are based on some uncontrollable factors, such as knowledge of mathematics foundations and loss of interest in the subject, or low ability in mathematics learning and lack of ability.

But now it's a well known fact that their self-confidence can be enhanced through guiding them to improve learning skills and correct negative attribution.

#### **4. DEFENSIVE ATTRIBUTION**

Some students are with "defensive attribution," in relation to academics; they usually do not study hard, not taking the initiative, losing interest, and always complaining. For example, they complain that mathematics is boring, mathematics curriculum materials are not good enough, and teachers do not teach well. Never do they try to find problems within themselves. Martin, Marsh, and Debus (2001) believe that students with repeated failures may develop a defensive attribution to protect themselves from negative feedback.

#### **5. METHODS OF HELPING STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

Slavin (2003) addresses four helpful general principles for supporting students with a tendency to accept failure: (1) Accentuate the positive. Understand the student's strengths and use these to develop their confidence; (2) Eliminate the negative. Deal with the student's weaknesses tactfully. Talk to the student and develop a plan to improve learning; (3) Go from the familiar to the new, using advanced organizers or guided discovery; and (4) Create challenges in which students actively create problems and solve them using their own knowledge and skills.

If the teachers follow these principles sincerely, definitely student success will follow. The two case studies discussed here focuses on investigating two types of students' learning styles, discussing some aspects of the transforming process, and developing some strategies that can be used in helping struggling students. The following research questions were asked in this study:

- 1) Which factors caused learned helplessness in the student learning mathematics?
- 2) Which factors caused defensive attribution in the student learning mathematics?
- 3) What kind of strategies can be used to help these two types of students with learning difficulties in mathematics?

#### **6. METHOD**

This study chose two adolescent s of class X1 who suffered difficulties learning mathematics as key cases. One student had learned helplessness and another student had defensive attribution in learning mathematics.

#### **7. CASE STUDY METHOD**

Case study is an appropriate choice of research method for studying the changing process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The descriptive narrative method is used to answer research questions.

##### **Case 1: Learned Helplessness**

The student having difficulties learning mathematics results from the lack of help from others or its perception of it.

##### **Background of Case 1**

**Research subject:** . Deepak, male, student in a school from Delhi

**Research period:** Between Aug 2013 – Dec. 2013

**Student demographic background:** Deepak's father is a Tailor master and his mother is a housewife. He lives with his parents in Delhi. His grandparents also live with him. He is elder child in his family so he knows his responsibilities about his family. He is an average student who gets along well with his teachers and class fellows. He got 50-60% in his earlier exams. And he knows that there is a scope for improvement.

#### **8. LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS**

Deepak is an extroverted character. he was a very helpful boy, he always helped his friends in their studies as well as on personal fronts, but in case of his own self, he never used to share anything personal with his school friends. His best friend being his sister and he shared all this personal problems with her. He wanted help that he should be taught effective learning skills in order to be more comfortable in learning.

#### **9. DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT**

The author chatted to Deepak and asked: "Do you like studies?"

Deepak said: "I don't know, I only study because all of us have to study and do homework."

The author: "Ok, tell me about your Maths performance."

He was surprised and reluctant to answer this question and kept silence a while, then said: "It is not very good."

The author: "Anything else?"

After the author contacted Deepak a few times, the author discovered that Deepak is indeed a sensible boy but feeling stressed. For example, he was asked the reasons why he could not do well in mathematics. He kept saying that he has

low ability in mathematics and could not remember the methods for solving problems with flexibility, and his brain cannot match this challenge. In addition, he felt he was not as clever as his classmates. The author attempted to guide him, and asked: "What do you think about your teacher's teaching? Do you think that your teacher cares for you?"

Deepak said: "My mathematics teacher is excellent, although I am not good at mathematics; the majority of students in the class do well. It can be proved that I was not good at mathematics. I think my teacher doesn't know my problem.. It is understandable because she is very busy and I am not good at mathematics. So she does not care about me."

The author: " But I am sure your teacher knows you well. She may be thinking that you are intelligent and can do your work."

Deepak: "Maybe."

Deepak felt very stressful in daily learning; he told the author that he felt nervous on seeing every new chapter and topic in the book, He thought he could not do it, felt stupid, and lost confidence completely.

#### **Analysis of Reasons for Deepak's Poor Performance**

During the time the author was with Deepak, he realised that Deepak's learning skills were not helping him resolve problems in maths. He would remember by rote, the steps and thus was not apply the concepts learnt on every other problem. This led to his losing confidence that he could not do well in maths as he was not able to understand the concepts well. When changing topics, he would not be able to deal with it, even he did a problem right, and he always doubted it. Deepak personally believed that his weak foundation in mathematics led to his failure.

Based on this particular learner's character and lack of help, the author attempted to develop some strategies to change his learning.

### **10.INTERVENTION**

- **Praise at proper time and enhance the student's confidence**

During the course of the time, they were together, the author would praise and applaud Deepak's performance with his work, be it any subject or topic and continue to reinforce the same. This led to Deepak's developing faith in his abilities to do better.

- **Encourage developing problem-solving skills**

The author not only developed Deepak's diligence but also pointed out his weaknesses in learning skills and encouraged him to talk to his classmates also to resolve his problems in learning. With time, he started to find out more methods to solve prove and also learnt to think analytically too.

- **Provide guidance to identify reasons beyond personal factors**

The author trained Deepak to analyse his strengths and weaknesses objectively and to realise that successful learning depends on many factors. It includes hard work, diligence, practice, sincerity, learning strategies and also support by teachers and class fellows. There is no harm in asking if one does not know and there is no shame in openly asking for help. After all we come to school for learning.

### **11.RESULTS**

Deepak made great progress during the term the study was done. He got 80 % in his final mathematics exam. The author asked him to talk about his experience of improvement. He was able to relate clearly, why and how of his thoughts.

The author continued to encourage him to apply effective learning skills. For example, his effective learning skills include outlining the structure of the topic, re-doing problems with mistakes in his homework, exchanging ideas with classmates, regularly reviewing the content, and focusing on the connection between mathematics concepts. As a result, his score on PGI Well being Scale also increased by 6 points. Before the intervention, his score was just 3. After counselling, the score rose to 9 points.

#### **Case 2: Defensive attribution**

The student having difficulties in learning results in "defensive attribution."

#### **Research Background of Case 2**

**Research subject:** Rohit, a class X1 Student from a Govt. School in Delhi.

**Research period:** Between Aug. and Dec. 2013.

**Student demographic background:** Rohit's parents are working on daily wages. Both of them are very busy and do not have time to help with his learning. The family's financial situation is not good. There is a large family of ten people. The parents have high expectations from him that his education will bring luck and more money in the family.

#### **Diagnostic Assessment**

When the second term started, the author interviewed Rohit and asked how he felt about his studies.

Rohit said: "Very bad, I cannot understand all of it."

The author: "What is your problem?"

Rohit "Well, the class teacher bore me, her lessons were not interesting, and she often lost her temper, and somehow is interested only in completing the syllabus fast.. I didn't like to study with her."

The author was surprised that he had such prejudice toward his teacher, and asked him: "Anything else?"

Rohit thought a while, said: "Yes, for example, there are many students who cheated in the exams, but the teacher didn't find out. After the exams, the teacher criticized students who failed, including me most of the time."

The author: "Do you think you can do better?"

"If I put more effort and practice more, I will be outstanding. But I don't want to." Rohit seems to be confident, but has a negative attitude.

The author: "You are clever; try to study hard. Can you achieve a good score on the next exam?"

"No problem," Rohit said.

#### **Analysis of Reasons for Rohit's Poor Performance**

"I can do these problems, but on the exam, I was nervous."

"Why were you absent from class a couple of days before the exam?"

"I fought with some classmates and that made my day bad on the day of the exam."

"Ok, now that you know the reason that this affects your performance, promise me, you will try not to get into a fight like this again."

"I will try my best."

After term final exams, the author talked to Rohit.

The author: "How were your exam results?"

Rohit was upset: "I think I did my best but don't know what happened in the evaluation of my answer scripts."

The author encouraged him and said: "You did few questions correctly, which means you have grasped the concept of sequences."

"Yes, I did. I understood arithmetic questions but geometric questions went beyond me."

The author: "Is it because you do not like geometry or what?"

Rohit: "Honestly, I have not really tried to work in this till now. I just copy the work from keys or from other students' work."

The author added: "That means, you realise that you need to work hard in this.."

Based on a series of test results and Rohit's performance, it could be seen that Rohit did not study hard, not taking the initiative, lost interest, and also complained that mathematics was boring, the mathematics teacher was no good, but never sought reasons from himself. Therefore, Rohit was identified as difficult learner because of external factors. So the following strategies were designed for improving Rohit's poor performance.

#### **Intervention**

##### **Objective analysis of the reasons for poor performance**

Rohit's teacher was told that Rohit has disadvantages in his character. He should not blame himself; however, he needs more patience in treating him and guiding him to know his merits and shortcomings. Encourage student to find the reasons for lacking effort in the subject She promised to do so.

Based on Rohit's character, the author intended to encourage Rohit's answering questions and presenting his thinking in front of his classmates. Also the author led Rohit to feel the teacher has cared about his improvement, in order to raise his expectation in learning. In addition, the teacher specifically treated him face to face when marking his homework. When the teacher found an error in Rohit homework, the teacher let him analyze the reason why he made a mistake. After that the teacher taught him the correct way. Finally, Rohit corrected it by himself. Focusing on analysis of attribution of success and failure after every exam

**Three months later**, Rohit, certainly seemed to have improved. He was able to score well in his exams, is now interested in the subject, has got interest in the subject now and his passion for learning also is more ignited now. His score on PGI Well Being Scale also increased by 5 points, his earlier score being 4.

#### **Conclusion**

This study focused on two cases, both class 11 students. The author employed different strategies to improve their performance. The author has attempted to draw the picture of "lack of help" and "defensive" attribution, and has found some strategies to address changing poor performance in learning.

With case one, the student was guided with more appropriate learning strategies to suit his unique personality, his negative attitude was corrected which led to enhancement of his confidence. The student was also helped to focus on his work by thinking analytically and by diligently revising the topics learnt. Thus his learning habits were improved.

With case 2, the student was helped to analyse the reasons for his poor performance, focus on his own efforts rather than trying to find the reasons for poor performance outside. His confidence also increased as a result and the teacher's help was also sought to improve his performance. It is necessary to have teacher's participation which also plays a role in the performance of the students..

Therefore, one can say with fair confidence that learning can be enhanced with appropriate *counselling interventions*. The above case studies prove a step further in this direction. The need for appreciation is universal in humans. Teachers and teacher trainees would do well to remember that if professional excellence is the pursuit.

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