Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

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CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Education is a unique investment and academic achievement is a vital aspect of it. 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. In this hectic process of attainment, a significant number of children lag behind, leaving parents and teachers with so much of disappointment and queries as to where it went wrong!

The reasons for achieving low in academics are numerous. However, most of the sensory and physical disabilities are radically apparent to the observer, but handicaps of the under achiever or scholastically backward student are not always so obvious. Their handicap is not related to their cognitive ability alone. In fact, a number of other factors interplay each other, that they are not able to meet the normal demands of the educational system. The period at which their limitations are so obvious is that of the school years. When they become adults, many of them will be absorbed into the community life and will contribute usefully without drawing undue attention to themselves.

The underachieving or scholastically backward children are classified into three broad categories: retarded students, who 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 specific handicaps; slow learners, 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 achievers, are those whose ability is not quite so limited, but who nevertheless have more difficulty in learning than average children. 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. (Thompson and Rudolph, 1992).

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.
The very fact that they are normal children having only school related problems, especially the achievement related ones, makes the study of low achievers a colossal task. The inherent ambiguities, inconsistencies and unknowns are to be taken into account, in any study of human beings. In the case of a child who deviates from the norms, one must multiply all the mysteries of normal human behaviour and development by those pertaining to the child's unique exceptionality. Because there is no single accepted theory of normal child development and accomplishment, it is not at all surprising that no definite statements could be made about the quantification of low achievement.

It is true that in the vast majority of cases it is unable to identify the exact reason why a child is achieving low. But progress is being made in determining the causes of some of the cases. Research is bringing a more complete understanding of the ways in which the low achieving child's psychological, social, and educational environment are related to the learning problems. Although researchers constantly lament that all the questions are not answered, it is known more today about how to tackle these children than it was 10 - 15 years ago. 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 herself 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.

The requisites for academic excellence could be adequate cognitive functioning; motivation to learn; age appropriate skills in reading, writing, language, comprehension, and numerical operations; uninterrupted attention; parent mediation; and school situations. Learning is a complex dynamic process that is been affected by bio psycho-social factors. A student develops and utilizes the knowledge and skills to acquire his maximum potentiality, based primarily on the biological functions of the nervous system, the psychological make up of the child such as his motivational level of achievement, his personality traits, his study skills and certain important social factors such as family interaction, teacher effectiveness, and peer pressure. In turn, home and school have cooperative duties in enhancing the individual potentials of an individual child.

The generally accepted individual factors conducive for academic achievement are intelligence, personality, study skills, and motivational level of the concerned student. Youngman (1980) examined various pupil characteristics that might determine subsequent academic performance on 640 students and intellectual characteristics showed the stronger effects. Further a study by Linn, Hampson and Magee (1983) also reported that the important predictor of educational attainment
was intelligence. Possession of certain personality traits are considered to be essential for better performance but extreme degree of certain traits are considered to be detrimental (Shaughnessy, 1993; Rothstein, 1994). Various studies show that high degree of neurotic traits has a negative effect on academic achievement of an individual (Eysenck, 1992; Anand, 1998).

In India, various studies have revealed that 5% to 35% of children suffer from some kind of maladjustment, which is generally termed as neuroses. These types of behaviours are more in school settings (Verma, 1981; Mehta and Kumar, 1985). Mental health and success are closely related. Emotionally maladjusted students often exhibit symptoms of impaired efficiency in learning and in problem solving situations.

In general, the documented data obtained from various studies showed a positive trend linking high performance on the achievement and good study habits (NAEP Facts, 1997; Snyder, 2000; Rao, Moely and Sachs, 2000; Hammers, Onweugbuzie and Slate, 2001; and Kovach, Fleming and Wilgosh, 2001).

Wu and Lin (1982), Teachman (1987), and Anand (1998) reported that high degree of achievement motivation was observed in high achievers. The family and the school are considered to be the important social factors contributing to academic achievement. It is often observed that in spite of having a range of similar intellectual levels, there are differences in academic achievement, among students coming from different families. Among the various related
factors, the influence of the family in a child's learning is undoubtedly the most significant one (Bronzaft, 1996; Lam, 1997; and Deal, Wampler, and Haverson, 1998).

In fact, Wu and Lin (1982), Teachman (1987), and Anand (1998) further reported that it is the quality of the family interaction pattern that is responsible for achievement motivation. Economic and social status of the family (Lam, 1997); parental education (Nord, 1998); the emotional environment at home (Bronzaft, 1996); the motivation of the family towards the child's education (Cooksey and Fondell, 1996) are the essential factors that help the child to make use of his potentials in a maximum productive way. Children of higher status are provided with better amenities and have greater opportunities to come in contact with the first hand knowledge and more often their home have a more stimulating environment for learning. A dysfunctional family cannot provide a harmonious environment and it can only create an unfavourable home condition, which is not conducive for a student's achievement.

It is found that a peaceful home environment, quality of maternal care, relationship between the parents, the extent to which reading books is a habit among the family members all play a significant role in a child's academic achievement (Jill, 1992; Moore, Andres and Pepler, 1997; and Westerman and La-luz, 1998). Paternal attitude to education, parents showing interest in school activities, encouragement to children and aspiration for children's education and career are yet other variables, which emerge as being
of out standing importance (Finn, 1998; Marcon, 1998; and Nord, 1998). A conducive school atmosphere and effective teaching are other important variables (Ellsworth and Monahan, 1991; and Tymms, 1994). Teacher effectiveness is an area of research which is considered with relationships between the characteristics of teachers, teaching activities, the professional qualities, the teacher student relationship and their effects on educational outcomes.

During the last couple of decades, there has been an increasing appreciation of these issues related to academic achievement. The awareness among the adult world to improve the learner's quality is on the rise now! The reviewed research findings, with regard to individual and social factors of academic achievement, that is been precisely highlighted in the initial part of this chapter gives a segregated coverage of various factors in a very segmented way. However, a comprehensive coverage of all these variables only would give an overall understanding of the problems of a low achiever. The various aspects do reveal that diagnosis means determining the variables. The variables could contribute to the ability or to the emotional aspect. This does not imply that the child is to be labeled and stored permanently as a low achiever. The variables are to be probed to determine the pathways to overcome the low achievement. It is preferable to think that there is hope for eventual eradication of many of the disabling forms of the variables. Conclusively, it is hoped that the effects of all these variables may be altered through appropriate intervention strategies.
THE NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the yester years, education was primarily for learning. But today the main purpose of education is for earning (Bhatti, 1993). 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 of students has been a great concern to educationist since time immemorial. Now a days, this trend has been intensively felt by the academicians, parents and students. Strikingly, academic achievement has become a detrimental index in determining a child’s future. This speaks a lot about the significance of taking up the present investigation. Going higher up in the social status by means of academic achievement is universally accepted and the most important determinant of a person’s adult status is his career. From crayons to career, the academic grading speaks a lot about one’s academic achievement. Academic achievement is generally an expression, when the individual learns to utilize his energies with the given innate potentials and a particular pattern of socializing pressure. Considering the fact that both innate potentials and environmental factors play equally important roles in academic achievement, it is imperative to look into the interplay of both these factors. Innate potentials, in terms of academic achievement is exhibited mainly through the intellectual functions, and of course there is a positive correlation between intellectual functions and academic achievement. However, there are certain confounding factors which mask the effect of this innate potential and in turn,
hamper the child's academic achievement in the course of his studentship. Specifically this group of students are those who have more inner cries. The parents and teachers are also not devoid of this, because in the absence of all external handicaps and with the presence of adequate and required intellectual abilities, they fail to achieve. In the present study this felt need has been met by assessing the intellectual functions and tapping various environmental factors which could be responsible for this turmoil. It has been seen that personality of the child is a very radiant and an influential factor that aids a child in academic excellence. Hence, its effect has been assessed in this study by assessing it comprehensively and sensitively using a highly reliable and valid questionnaire which is developed on the basis of a strong theoretical construction. However, the very fact that family is the basic socializing unit, that fine tunes the formation and existence of a child, forces the investigator to become sensitive to include it as a major variable. The objective has been met with the administration of a standardized tool that taps the processes that are going on in a child's family. And a number of other family related variables have been incorporated in the socio- demographic data sheet to make the picture all the more clear to the world of research.

Though these are the two major propelling forces that act on a child toward academic excellence, there are other equally stronger intrinsic forces that leave its significant marks on academic achievement. Study skills or study habits and academic achievement motivation are those intrinsic factors that in turn act as
a self rewarding system in one's forward movement with scores. The investigator had felt a need that the study would be comprehensive only when such innermost factors are taken into consideration.

Another significant area that has been powerfully intertwined with all the above said factors and yields the ultimate crop is the school factor. This broad area has a number of break-ups and the teacher student relationship is the core aspect of it. Hence, it forms a part of the present investigation. Other physical parameters that are related to school are assessed through the items that are specifically designed in the socio demographic data sheet. Conclusively saying, academic achievement is an index as well as an affair that has its roots from nervous system to neighbourhood and only a thorough and comprehensive assessment would be able to point out the detrimental factors that are responsible for the dilemma of academic low achievement. Hence, all possible care has been taken to be sensitive to investigate all the needed information, so as to give a consolation to the inner cry of many, who are associated with this silent childhood disability. It is ironical to note that though abundant amount of literature tries to describe the existence of the condition and the processes that are involved with this condition, yet silent so far to determine the epidemiological distribution of this condition in any context. In fact, this scarcity exists through out the world scenario. In India, one of the major problems presented in schools by teachers and in the clinics by parents is, that of academic low achievement of children.

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39% of the normal and 44% of the disturbed, 12 to 16 years old are reported to have scholastic backwardness (Rozario, 1988). However, the epidemiology would only be increasing while considering the causal factors. This again indicates the pressing need of today's society, to take up this issue as a research topic.

Different researchers regarding scholastic backwardness in general have taken up various studies. However, a comprehensive, yet concise research work, focusing those closely related psycho-social variables in low academic achievement could not be located even in the world research scenario. Hence, much work needs to be done with reference to each variable and its interaction with each other, as suggested by the theories as well as the empirical findings of the earlier researchers. Thus, this study aims at a new perspective, with an earnest attempt to satisfy the need of presenting an epidemiology of the condition, and the factors related to it. Hope the findings of the study would equip the professionals with the information about the required strategies in alleviating the condition of low achievement. Conclusively, this is a study, which is in its nascent stage but could be of use to various others who are related to the condition of low academic achievement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem under investigation focuses on the influence of personality traits, family factors, academic achievement motivation, study skills, and school factors on academic low achievement. Hence, the study is entitled; PSYCHO SOCIAL VARIABLES IN
RELATION TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT – A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HIGH AND LOW ACHIEVERS.

Definitions of the key terms in the title

Psycho Social Variables: are conceptualized as Personality traits, Family Interaction Pattern, Study Habits, Academic Achievement Motivation, and Teacher Effectiveness.

Conceptual definitions:

Personality Traits: "are those which permit a prediction of what a person will do in a given situation", as assessed by the 14 factors High School Personality Questionnaire, which was developed by Cattell and Scheier (1961).

Family Interaction Pattern: "is defined as those socio-psychological transactions occurring in the family as a system to evolve the processes of decision making, emotional expressions, and personal views assigning tasks and social status enabling the family members to contribute for the growth of the family by generating morphogenesis at the emotional, intellectual, and social levels through the manipulation of the internal and external social milieu", as assessed by the family interaction pattern scale, developed by Bhatti (1986).

Study Habits: "The study habits of the individual cover mainly the reading habits, the motivation to learn, memory, time schedule, physical conditions, note taking skills, the style of preparation for the examination, examination writing skill, the use of examination result
and the health of the student" as assessed by the study habits inventory, developed by Palsane and Sharma (1989).

   **Academic Achievement Motivation:** "A pattern of planning, of actions, and of feelings connected with striving to achieve some internalized standard of excellence". (Vidler, 1997).

   **Teacher Effectiveness:** "Is an area of research which is concerned with relationships between the characteristics of teachers, teaching acts, and their effects on educational outcomes of classroom teaching". (Flanders and Simon, 1969).

   **Academic Achievement:** is conceptualized as, "that encompasses the student's ability and performance; it is multidimensional; it is intricately related to human growth and cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development; it reflects the whole child; it is not related to a single instance, but occurs across time and levels, through a student's life in public school and on to post secondary years and working life". (Steinberger, 1993).

   High achievers & low achievers are defined with operational definitions.

**OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS**

   High achievers: Students whose intellectual functioning are of the average grade when assessed by a standardized intelligence test and who have scored an average of 60% and above in each of the three consecutive terminal examinations as considered as high
achievers. It is specified that they have scored 60% marks and above in each subject for all these examinations.

Low achievers: Students whose intellectual abilities are in the average range on a standardized intelligence test but who nevertheless have more difficulty in achieving pass marks in all the subjects are considered as low achievers. For the present study, they are selected as those students who fail in one or more subjects in any or all of the terminal examinations and whose total marks in each of the three consecutive terminal examinations or on any one examination fall below 35% in aggregate. Their levels of intelligence were in the average grade as assessed by a standardized intelligence test.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study were:

1. To find out whether there is any difference between high and low achievers in the personality traits.

2. To find out whether there is any difference between high and low achievers in the family interaction pattern.

3. To find out whether there is any difference between high and low achievers in the academic achievement motivation.

4. To find out whether there is any difference between high and low achievers in the study habits.
5. To find out whether there is any difference between high and low achievers in the teacher effectiveness.

6. To find out whether there is any association between high and low achievers to certain socio demographic variables.

7. To identify the better predictor variables of high and low academic achievement.

8. To develop and standardize the teacher effectiveness scale.

HYPOTHESES

The major hypotheses are stated here and *4 of the major hypotheses have specific hypotheses which are elaborated under sub hypothesis. The general hypotheses formulated are:

*1. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality traits.

*2. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on family interaction patterns.

3. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on academic achievement motivation.

*4. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the study habits.
5. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the teacher effectiveness.

6. There will be significant association between certain socio demographic variables and high and low academic achievement.

7. Academic high achievement and academic low achievement can be predicted from a set of predictor variables.

Sub-hypotheses

*1. a. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor A.

b. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor B.

c. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor C.

d. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor D.

e. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor E.

f. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor F.
g. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor G.

h. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor H.

i. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor I.

j. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor J.

k. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor O.

l. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor Q2.

m. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor Q3.

n. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on personality trait factor Q4.

*2. a. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on family interaction patterns.

b. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on reinforcement.
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c. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on social support system.

d. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on role pattern.

e. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on communication pattern.

f. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on cohesion.

g. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on leadership.

*4. a. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the study habits.

b. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the budgeting time.

c. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the physical condition.

d. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the reading ability.

e. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the note taking style.
f. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the learning motivation.

g. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the memory.

h. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the examination taking style.

i. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the health.

*5. a. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the teacher effectiveness.

b. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the personal characteristics.

c. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the professional characteristics.

d. There will be significant difference between high and low achievers specific to gender on the teacher student relationship.
SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is expected to throw light on the various aspects on one of the most pressing issues in the present educational system—that is achievement of students far below their ability. The advantages of investigating the different aspects that might affect this condition are many. First, it is looked forward to reveal many informative findings, and thereby increase the quality of knowledge regarding this condition. Second, vivid recommendations could be made to schools, families and government policy makers on different issues of this condition so that the indexed students would be helped out of their problems. Third, the net working of the psychologists, social workers, teachers and parents could be knitted strongly, so as to provide those students a back of primary, secondary and tertiary social support system. Fourth, the findings would help those who are involved with outreach programs to create an awareness about the different aspects of this condition. Fifth, the study might endure as a starting for further investigations on this field. Conclusively, the investigator hopes that the study would be of great use to the concerned students, teachers, family members and all others who are interested in the field of education and the welfare of the exceptional children. Thus the pernicious mix of myth and reality underlying the campaign against academic low achievement is explored.
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Every possible effort, small and big has been taken with utmost caution to conduct this research work, as scientific as possible. Still, certain limitations, which are inevitable in this kind of studies, have crept in. The following limitations would be taken care of while interpreting and generalizing the results. The samples were taken only from Kottayam educational district. A larger representation from all districts would have given more authenticity for wider generalization of the findings. Individual sessions with each child as a method of test administration, and mathematical applications in analysis, if employed could have given a more sensitive information.

While collecting the data consistency and continuity could be reassured to maximize the reliability of the information. However, the third factor corroboration of the data with the informant has not been recorded separately as it was not intended as an agenda in the present research. The categorization of low achievers was done based on the careful scrutiny of school records and assessment of cognitive ability. However, the investigator would have felt more satisfied if a standardized intelligence test, which has a performance and verbal part appropriate to the age, education and culture was administered.
CHAPTERIZATION

The format of the thesis is as follows. The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one, is the introduction, which has been written with care to cover all the adequate information that needs to be conveyed, so as to introduce the present topic of research work. Chapter two, highlights the review of the background literature and the abstracts of the previous research findings, which had provided the baseline to proceed with this research work. Chapter three, describes the methodology, which is the backbone of the thesis, that depicts the method of study, description of the samples, sampling procedure, the tools used, the data collection procedure, the statistical techniques used and the analysis of the data. Chapter four, discusses the analysis and interpretation of results, which stands as the brain baby of the research work that has been carried out. Chapter five, concludes with the summary, implications and suggestions - a sigh of what needs to be conclusively said, after an extensive scientific research work, that has been carried out for the welfare of those who had provided the largest bundle of information that stayed as the foundation for this research work.