

Investigating the Root Causes of Underachievement among Gifted Underachievers and Adapting Trifocal Model for Reversing their Underachievement

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Giftedness has been traditionally associated with intellectual superiority. Gifted students are one group of exceptional learners who are not normally considered at risk for academic failure or problems. It is a harsh reality of today's world that a large number of gifted students do not gain high level of academic success as per their capability. In recent years, underachievement in gifted students is one of the most bewildering educational issues that many parents and educators face. A combination of school, family and personal factors results in underachievement of gifted students. By controlling some of these factors and by creating an appropriate learning environment, gifted students can achieve more. The purpose of this study was to investigate factors responsible for academic underachievement in gifted students. For this purpose, Rimm's Trifocal model was used.

Rimm's Trifocal Model (1995) is one of the most comprehensive approaches to underachievement. The model consists of six steps for reversing underachievement, i.e., assessment of skills, abilities and type of underachievement in a gifted child; communication among parents, teachers and students; changing the expectations of important others; identification of a role model; correction of skill deficiencies and modification of reinforcement at home and school.

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Research Questions

The specific research questions guiding the study were:

- What is the incidence of underachievement in gifted students?
- What factors contribute to underachievement in gifted students?
- Does Trifocal model helps in reversing underachievement among gifted students?

Objectives

The major objectives of the research were:

- To study the incidence of underachievement in gifted students.
- To explore possible factors and combination of factors contributing to each gifted student's pattern of underachievement by taking into account the perspective of students, their parents and teachers.
- To adapt Trifocal model for reversing underachievement among gifted underachievers.

Method

Research Design: A qualitative multi-case study approach was used to address the objectives of the study.

Sample: In the present study, 30 secondary school students were selected from three regions of Punjab, i.e., Doaba, Malwa and Majha by employing multistage random sampling method. Four districts from Malwa region and one district each from Doaba and Majha region were randomly selected. Thereafter, 30 schools were randomly selected from six selected districts that included a selection of five government and private schools from each district.

Tools

The following tools were used in the study.

1. The Advanced Progressive Matrices (APM) by Raven, Raven and Court (1998) was used to measure the intelligence levels of the students.
2. Teacher's nomination form (Parke, 1989) was used to identify gifted students.
3. Factors responsible for students' underachievement were identified through the following assessment tools:

- Social Skills Rating Scale
- Teaching Style Scale
- Leisure Time Activity
- Parental Disciplinary Practices Inventory
- Teacher Effectiveness Scale
- Parental Involvement Scale
- Adolescents Habits Scale
- Guidance Need Inventory
- Parent-Child Relationship Scale
- Home Environment Scale
- Level of Educational Aspiration Test
- Internet Usage Scale

Procedure of Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected employing case study method. An accurate view of causes of underachievement among gifted students was gained with the help of direct student interviews, students' essay, interviews with the teacher, observations and reflections by the teacher and interviews with the parents. A comprehensive assessment of each of the selected students was conducted through standardised tools which in turn, formed the basis to identify different types of underachievers, i.e., dependent conformers, dominant conformers, dependent non-conformers and dominant non-conformers. The details of the four types are given below.

Dependent Conformers: They are sensitive, day dreamers, get frustrated easily and show various tantrums to gain attention of their parents and teachers. They prefer easy tasks and are overprotected by their parents.

Dominant Conformers: These children tend to set unreasonable high goals for themselves and demonstrate enormous discipline in the fields of their choice as long as they are winners. They put down teachers who do not recognise their talents.

Dependent Non-conformers: Typically, they are noticeable as sad and lonely. Their illness and psychosomatic complaints are more frequent which cause them to miss more school. Pediatricians often diagnose them as pressured children.

Dominant Non-conformers: They rarely ask for help and tend to blame their environment (family, school and society) for their

problems. These children establish their identity by opposition. They push limits and refuse to accept no. They feel out of control and depressed unless they dominate other people in their environment. Finally, Rimm's Trifocal Model was administered for reversing underachievement of such gifted students.

Steps for Reversal of Underachievement through Rimm's Trifocal Model

Step 1 — Assessment of skills, abilities and types of underachievement: The main purpose of this step is to determine the extent and direction of a child's underachievement through formal and informal methods of assessment.

For interviews: The semi-structured interviews were developed for this study. It consisted of 23 open-ended questions designed to elicit information in six broader areas namely: assessment of skills, abilities and types of underachievement, communication, changing the expectations of important others, role model identification, correcting skill deficiencies and modification of reinforcements at home and school.

Step 2 — Communication: This involves team-work among parents, teachers and students.

Step 3 — Changing the expectations of important others: Significant others such as, parents, teachers, peers and siblings need to change their expectations from children as per their capability. Often, test results and anecdotal information can provide convincing evidence of their abilities.

Step 4 — Role model identification: Children can learn appropriate behaviours more easily if they have effective role models to imitate such as, parents, teachers, siblings, etc.

Step 5 — Correcting skill deficiencies: Poor performance of underachievers in school may occur due to lack of basic educational skills necessary for their further success. Thus, tutoring should be goal-directed and of a specified duration to overcome their skill deficiencies.

Step 6 — Modification of reinforcements at home and school: Modify home and school reinforcements that support underachievement of children.

Data Analysis

It was done by using constant comparative inductive method that included four stages, viz., comparison of incidents applicable to each category; integration of categories and their properties; delimiting the theory and writing the theory. The information from the interviews and documents were first read thoroughly and then were analysed through open coding where all segments were labeled or noted and thereafter, recorded on index cards. By sorting the code notations, categories were emerged by comparing and contrasting notations and relating concepts to experiences and knowledge of the researchers.

Once, the categories were defined and exemplified, these were subdivided into themes for clarity and parsimony, especially, in context of general questions that were guiding the study. Finally, themes were used to generate grounded theory about the dynamics of reversing the underachievement pattern.

Results

Low self confidence, higher expectations, over protectiveness of parents, poor time management and organisational skills, dull and boring classroom environment, inconsistency, work pressure, etc., were a few identified factors that hindered academic performance of gifted students. However, Trifocal model brought significant positive impact on the performance of gifted underachievers. It developed greater self-confidence and decreased their negative feelings. It brought reversal in their underachieving behaviour such as, tendencies of prolonged delay in commencing work. They developed a positive attitude towards school and teachers. They became more organised and improved their social and leadership skills.

Overall, the results of the study indicated a general trend towards improvement in the school performance. In this way, with the help of Trifocal Model, educators can motivate and inspire children to achieve, feel good about themselves and to make contribution in a society in an area that needs their contributions.

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