

ADOLESCENCE

ACADEMIC SUCCESS - STUDENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

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Abstract: *Academic success is paramount in any school/college program. The faculty spent a lot of time to teach many subjects, but often do not guide the students how to study. Poor scholastic performance of school going children is a problem that affect many parents. The predictor variables for poor scholastic performance were; not studying daily lessons, poor concentration in studies, lower education status of father and unhappy family. Early guidance and support may stop students experiencing a cycle of failure. Key to supporting struggling students is to identify reasons for poor performance. Many students lack basic academic skills and do not know how to learn effectively. The transition from school to professional education may affect students emotionally, socially and academically. Recall of information is essential for successful performance in examinations. Better recall can be achieved by time management of study periods and regular systematic learning. Prepare a revision timetable and set out what topics, subjects you want to cover each day.*

Keywords: *Academic success, Scholastic performance, Student support, Enhancing memory.*

Academic success is paramount in any school/college program. The faculty spent a lot of time to teach many subjects, but often do not guide the students how to study. The major reasons for increased attrition rates in school / college education are course failure, stress, burnout, personal health issues, psycho-social problems, financial

issues and other family difficulties. Academic failure is a problem for the students, teachers, the school/college and society as a whole. If struggling students could be identified early in the course and additional guidance and support services offered, that will improve the academic skills. Without guidance and feedback, weak students will have ongoing difficulties.

Poor scholastic performance of school going children is a problem faced by many parents. Scholastic backwardness was observed among 10 to 20% high school children. On multivariate analysis the predictor variables for poor scholastic performance were; not studying daily lessons, poor concentration in studies, lower education status of father and unhappy family.¹ A significant number of children with scholastic backwardness in normal schools are slow learners. In a study, children with IQ in the 70-90 range were given individualized education for a period of 4 months and evaluated the effectiveness of an individualized education program (IEP) for slow learners, modeled on resource room training in normal schools. After the training, 87% of children had improvement in either mathematics, reading or writing and 47% had improvement in all the three areas, suggesting that IEP will lead to improvement in academic functioning of children who are slow learners.²

Though a small percentage of children with learning difficulties have specific learning disabilities like difficulty with reading, writing and mathematics, the problems in the majority may be attributed to; undetected subnormal intelligence, poor home environment / poor study habits, problems in the school including specific subject problem / poor fit with a teacher and not very uncommonly mental health problems. For example, a CDC-Kerala study on prevalence of depression among adolescents revealed that 11.2% of school dropouts had severe and extreme grades of depression as against 3% among school going adolescents.³

Student support and guidance

Early guidance and support may stop students experiencing a cycle of failures. Key to supporting struggling students is to identify reasons for poor performance. Many students lack basic academic skills and

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do not know how to learn effectively. In order to help students overcome their learning difficulties, innovative teaching is required during the first year of higher secondary school/university education, designed to foster the joint development of knowledge, basic skills and right attitude. In the case of less well-prepared students who lack self-confidence, a caring and supportive learning environment is crucial to the achievement of meaningful learning.

Organizing student support and guidance program need specific strategies:

Step.1: Workshops to understand the reasons for course failure,

Step.2: Training support teachers, two from each affiliated school/college,

Step.3: Self-evaluation of study skills,

Step.4: Reaching out directly to the students,

Step.5: Continued support to the students through trained faculty and

Step.6: Establishment of student support and guidance cell in each affiliated school/college by their own faculty and management.

Academic issues and effective learning

The transition from school to professional education may affect students emotionally, socially and academically. The initial exposure to new environment, academic competitiveness, personal independence, large campus, etc can be overwhelming. The students who have entered the university from different academic backgrounds need proper study skills to secure good academic results. Some professional students who perform poorly or drop out during their first year may have common characteristics.

Ten reasons for student's failure⁴

- **Difficulty with medium of instruction:** Sudden shift from mother tongue to English may create problems in understanding and reproducing facts.
- **Lack self-motivation:** Some students lack self-motivation and are unwilling to commit themselves to self-improvement. They are unable to handle "independence."
- **Lack of persistence:** Many who fail lack the will to persist because they have little or no career interest. Consequently, they do not have any idea of why they are in college.

- **Negative attitude:** Some students have a negative attitude about themselves, their friends, their class, their college, their neighbourhood, etc. They verbally express this attitude frequently.
- **Wrong priorities:** Some students' priorities do not include educational progress, but do include other activities like, love affair, friendship, etc.
- **Irregular attendance:** Many poor performers do not attend classes or attend infrequently.
- **Uncomfortable with school/college environment:** Some students get lost in the largeness of the institution and do not seek out the many avenues of educational and personal support available to them in the campus.
- **Giving up too quickly:** Poor grades in exam and internal assessment discourage students to regroup and to study.
- **Not being realistic:** Not having a clear idea of what college life is like or how to study effectively. They are overwhelmed with the memorizations and the amount of work required.
- **Practicing procrastination:** Some students do practice procrastination meaning the practice of carrying out less urgent tasks in preference to more urgent ones, or doing more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones, and thus putting off impending tasks to a later time, sometimes to the "last minute" before a deadline.

Strategies to manage procrastination

The first step is to identify why one may be procrastinating and take the following appropriate steps to overcome each one of them;

Fear of failure: To overcome this focus on goal setting, reframe thoughts more positively and simply begin, knowing that one can redraft later.

Anxiety about the task: To overcome this one need to break the task or goal into mini-goals and seek assistance in ensuring that one properly understand the task.

Managing time badly: To overcome this, one has to prioritize tasks and create realistic daily, weekly and term plans.

Have personal issues: In addition to professional support, support from family and friends will be helpful.

Have trouble concentrating: Ensure that the study space is distraction-free and comfortable with good lighting as in a library. Complete the more difficult tasks when one is

most alert. Study when the house is most quiet, perhaps late at night or early in the morning and ask family or friends to support by not disturbing during the study times.

Identifying learning styles and using it positively⁵

At higher secondary / University level a student would be expected to be an independent learner and therefore, it is advisable to think carefully about learning style and how best one can use learning strengths to support academic studies.

Auditory learner: If one is an auditory learner, it means one can learn best by hearing information in the following ways: To read aloud as to learn information; talk through and/or review information with friends; record information on to tape or disc to enable to listen back. Ask a friend to read text or lecture notes aloud; have music playing in the background while one reads or writes and works in a silent room.

Visual learner: Visual learners often learn best from seeing information presented in diagrams, charts or pictures.

Visual techniques: Plan work using spider diagrams, lists or tables, pictograms and mind maps. Write down all information and use colour pens to highlight important information when reading. Use colour paper for different modules or subjects; use large wall charts or planners to organize work; try to visualize information and ideas in mind; change the environment or position in which one works as this may create a link between ones visual settings with a particular subject area.

Kinesthetic learner: A kinesthetic learner will learn best by touching, doing or moving.

Think physically: By discussing ideas with friends; putting different arguments and ideas on separate pieces of paper when planning essays, allows to physically organise answer; going over information in one's mind while walking, jogging or swimming; using colour or draw pictures and diagrams alongside written notes and moving around environment during independent study time.

Multi-sensory learning

It doesn't matter how one learns as long as one uses the methods which suits. However, a combination of the use of all the senses is the best way to learn. Multi-sensory learning can help anyone to enhance the experience of learning and improve recall of important information. Information is received by the brain through the sensory channels. These channels are; visual (seeing information),

auditory (hearing information), kinaesthetic (touching, moving or doing), olfactory (smelling and making associations related to smell) and taste (what we experience from the mouth and tongue). Consider how strongly a smell, taste or hearing a piece of music can remind a previous situation or event. This is because all sensory channels work simultaneously to link different emotions to create that experience.

It appears that on average one will remember: 20% of what one reads; 30% one hears; 40% of one sees; 50% of what one says; 60% one does; 90% when one says, hears, sees and does. Multi-sensory learning involves activating as many of the senses as possible at the same time to aid understanding and recall.

Time management for study and leisure

Misuse of time is probably the most common form of mistake that students use to undermine their attempts to study. Defining tasks previously and prioritising activities may help better management of time, even if needs to be altered

Benefits of time management: It is essential for success, allows to spread workload over the course, helps to prioritize workload and to work out how to use time as efficiently as possible, reduces the anxiety and stress that is common whilst meeting the demands of study, decreases the likelihood of tasks being left to the last minute which often compromises performance and helps to schedule time for fun.

The ABC approach: Categorize commitments according to the following groups;

- **A**bsolutely urgent (high importance)
- **B**etter do it soon (medium importance)
- **C**an wait (low importance)

How to manage time effectively: In addition to assessing the ability to concentrate on certain tasks, one needs to learn how to balance personal life with school/college work. While school/college students devote a significant amount of their time to attending class and studying outside the classroom, they also have personal commitments like work, family and friends they need to take into consideration.

Class notes as a study support system

Making good notes efficiently is a key skill for studying.

General tips for taking notes are as follows

- Notes should contain the date, subject, names of the colleagues, the name of the lecturer and sources of information and page number.
- Different headings for main subject areas on separate sheets of A4 paper as per these notes are liked immediately.
- Put references in the margin, note keywords, indicate if hand-outs on the subject or add information later.
- To leave blank spaces after each note for example. The 'visual image' of notes and blank spaces may help to remember the information recorded. If necessary, use the space to note information you wish to add later.
- Number and/or label notes with headings and subheadings. Indentations and bullet points.
- Highlight to pick key words and phrases. Underline the main points with color pen. Pictures or diagrams may aid their recall.
- To link related notes use arrows, lines, brackets and enclose them in a rectangle.

Preparation and planning for examinations

There are three main forms of examinations, which are commonly used in tertiary assessment. These are multiple choice exams, short answer questions and essay questions. Examinations may comprise combinations of some or all of these alternatives.

Multiple choice questions: Multiple choice questions usually take about a minute each to read, decide on an answer and enter the response. If a question is difficult, mark it, move on and come back at the end if there in time.

Short answer questions: Short answer questions test discreet bits of knowledge and are much more focused than essay questions, therefore responses are expected to be brief and to the point. Usually these types of questions are quite specific, and answers must be specific too.

Essay questions: There will usually be two or three essays to write within the time allowed. In essay questions, the examiner tests understanding of a topic, the concepts and issues, rather than rote memory of facts. Focus and structure are important.

Failure in examinations can be attributed to poor preparation and planning, exam nerves or negative effects of stress. It is important to employ strategies to revise the lessons skillfully in order to ensure better performance in examinations.

Enhancing memory: Recall of information is essential

for successful performance in examinations. Better recall can be achieved by time management of study periods and regular systematic learning.

The following techniques will help to improve memory:

- Use multi-sensory methods – Write it, say it, see it, hear it
- Read, recall, review when reading
- Summarize key information onto one page using coloured paper
- Use mind maps
- Put key information into poster format and stick on your wall
- Use colored pens to highlight important facts, to link ideas or to separate arguments
- Record revision notes or answers. Hearing the recorded information may help to remember it
- Group revision may be helpful

Examination related stress, anxiety and depression

Anxiety is the body's natural response to danger, and an automatic alarm when one feel threatened; is under pressure or facing a stressful situation like examination. In order to reduce stress, the students need to make; a realistic revision timetable for model examination and stick to the timetable at any cost; make brief notes of the books, notes and essays to make them easier to digest quickly, especially if one do not like the subject or find it difficult. Most students would benefit by simple tips for reducing stress and anxiety. However, a few may need professional counseling as anxiety disorders and depression are not uncommon in the general adolescent population. In a cross-sectional study involving 201 school going adolescents using Beck Depression Inventory and Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders, it was reported that 40.8% showed mild mood disturbance to severe and extreme depression and 54.7% participants had one or the other type of anxiety.⁶

In another cross-sectional study that recruited 537 adolescents aged 11-19 years and 500 out of them completed the study successfully including 36.6% boys and 63.4% girls, the prevalence for all anxiety disorders using the international, Indian SCARED cut-offs and DSM-IV-TR criteria was 8.6%, 25.8% and 14.4% respectively. In the same rural population of adolescents depressive disorders were concurrently present in 23.7% of adolescents with anxiety disorder, while 13.9% had

concurrently only major depressive disorder, 8.3% had only dysthymia and 1.5% had both. Suicidal behavior was increased by the presence of anxiety disorder and being a boy increased the risk of suicidal behavior associated with anxiety disorder.⁷

Academic success - Some simple tips

- Preparing a revision time table incorporating the topics and subjects one should cover each day.
- Best way is to study for a short period and keep some time for relaxation.
- This relaxation time should include walking, cycling, aerobic, exercise, dancing, or swimming anything that de-stress the mind and body.
- Whenever there is difficulty in concentration, it is better to have a break and then to resume studies.
- Highlighting the important and difficult areas will be helpful to make revision as well as to discuss with the teacher and friends for clarity. This discussion will be mutually useful.
- One should not postpone the revision to last hours.
- One should ensure balanced diet; not to miss breakfast which will cause lack of energy, restlessness. This will provide right frame of mind and concentration.
- Ensuring and organizing various needs like pencil, eraser, pens and rulers a day prior to examination is a wise idea.
- Whole question paper should be read with concentration to plan the time for each answer.
- If one question cannot be answered, comfortable question can be attempted first and then the difficult question can be answered later.
- When one gets stressed up, some breathing exercises like deep breathing and slow down breathing may be helpful.

Points to Remember

- *In addition to teaching individual subjects, every faculty should guide the students on method of study.*

- *This is implemented by organizing student support and guidance program with specific strategies.*
- *Faculty should identify reasons for student's failure, and offer specific help.*
- *Time management by balancing study and leisure time activities.*
- *Students should be taught about preparing for different type of questions namely multiple choice, short answers and essay.*
- *Organizing the time, practicing memory enhancing methods, taking balanced diets, controlling the stress, discussing with teachers, combined study and organized revision will help succeed in exam.*

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