

## **Risk Factors for Academic Backwardness: An Intervention Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Academic backwardness in school is not simply an intellectual matter, but that it is a condition where normal school achievement has been prevented by a variety of interacting influences. Therefore, the present study examined the risk factors which are associated with academic backwardness among school children. The sample consisted of 76 academically backward children of both the gender studying in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> standards from two villages of Dharwad taluk. A structured checklist developed by AICRP – CD scientists on reasons for academic backwardness was used to assess the causal factors for academic underachievement. Results revealed that majority of children expressed hard to study some subjects, slow in writing and inability to give answers to all the questions in the exams quoted as academic reasons. In familial factors children perceived that their home environment is not conducive for the study, family income and parent's occupation disturbing their studies, parents and family members did not contributing much to their studies and lack of expected cooperation from family members. With respect to health problems worry, tension and stress during study, Tiredness due to the long distance of school from home, lack of concentration, headache and restlessness making the child to underachieve in the school. The intervention was found to be effective in modifying the environment of school, home and also the behavior of students, parents and teachers. Hence reducing the risk factors related to academic, familial and health aspects.

**Keywords:** Academically backward, Familial reasons, Health reasons, Intervention, Mass academic reasons

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is a universal truth that all children are basically same but are different up to a limit from each other physically, mentally, educationally and socially. It is therefore, not unusual to find in classroom, many students who do not benefit much from the usual classroom teaching mostly designed for the normal or averages students. Among such children, there may be two groups of children, the first one who possess a superior intellectual potential and a unique creative ability to deal with their environment, known as “gifted” children and the second one who do not progress from grade to grade according to the normal rate of the school system and who constantly require special assistance in the classes

in which they are enrolled and are called “backward” (Karande and Kulkarni, 2005). It has already been shown by various researches that backwardness in school is not simply an intellectual matter, but that it is a condition where normal school achievement has been prevented by a variety of interacting influences.

A significant number of children fail to perform adequately in academics without any apparent limitation. In a considerable number of these incidences, there is a discrepancy between the children's potential and their actual performance. It is a known fact that each student of the class brings a unique set of characteristics to the classroom: different background knowledge, intelligence, and a unique learning style, a variety of interests and

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varied parental support and expectations. Every student possesses different intelligence, interests, learning styles and educational problems which may influence his academic achievement. It is an important fact that these variables definitely affect the educational backwardness. A low general intelligence-the inborn general capacity, is found to be the commonest and most serious in all the causes of educational sub-normality (Cyril Burt, 1937). But it is not necessary that all backward children have less than average IQ or ability. It may possible that a child may be backward in spite of having high intelligence. Quite a number of children with high intelligence show a great deal of 'scatter' in their scholastic achievement because of the impact of emotional and social maladjustment.

It is considered that students generally face various educational problems. Because of these problems, the students may not concentrate on their studies and become educationally backward. Hence, many problems related to teachers and teaching, social atmosphere, organizational or administration and cultural causes may be responsible for low academic achievement. Under these circumstances, the students are surrounded by many problems which may be related to poor self-concept, lack of parent's involvement and encouragement, damaging peer pressure, cultural deprivation, emotional problems and physical illness. Therefore, it is necessary that not only the teachers but also the parents of the backward students must root out the causes of the backwardness and create such type of environment where such students take interest in educational activities and make their academic achievement high. With this background the proposed study is to identify the risk factors and to study the impact of intervention on reasons of academic backwardness among school going children.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The sample comprised of 76 academically backward children out of 139 normal population including both the gender studying in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> standards from two villages namely Kotur (n=40) and Mummigatti (n=36) of Dharwad taluk. Academically backward children were identified based on two criteria i.e. academic performance of the children in the previous year (those who secure 'C' grade

& attending remedial classes) & opinion of respective class teachers about children. Further the selected children were administered with a structured checklist developed (AICRP – CD) on reasons for academic backwardness. The tool consisted 42 statements with respect to academic, familial and health aspects of children with two alternative responses namely 'yes' and 'no'. The scores obtained by the children were taken as pre test scores, later the same group were intervened through lectures, videos and demonstration by subject experts through different sessions for about 8 hours. Intervention includes the topics like method for accurate reading, how to develop concentration, when to study, what to study, how much to study for better retention, methods for memorizing, organization of reading material etc. The same children were followed up for post test with one week gap, the children were again administered with same checklist on reasons for academic background and scores were considered as post test scores. During post test, due the reason of irregular attendance 8 children were dropped.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

It is evident from the Table 1 that majority of children felt very hard to study some subjects (67%) followed by slow writing (63.2%) and inability to give answers to all the questions in the exams (55.3%) in pre test. It is interesting to note that there was drastic reduction in with problems related to academic reasons from post test scores. After the intervention, the students were improved with understanding the subjects taught in the class, making themselves able to prepare hard prior to the exams, motivating themselves to study the difficult part of the subject, able to sit for the long lasting class and lastly adjust with teachers, peers and with school environment. This result is in support with study of Chaturvedi (2009) reported that effect of school environment on academic achievement of young adolescents. He reported that facing difficulty in understanding the subjects, long duration of teaching, partiality in the class were the major contributing factors for the academic backwardness in children.

It is observed from the Table 2 from pre test score, boys quoted many academic reasons compared to their

**Table 1: Academic problems of academically backward children at pre and post test**

Academic Reasons	Pre test (n=76)		Post test (n=68)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I don't understand what teachers teach in the class.	36(47.4)	40(52.6)	6(8.8)	62(91.2)
I don't like few subjects that's why I am lagging behind.	35(46.1)	41(53.9)	32(47.1)	36(52.9)
I feel that some subjects are hard.	51(67.1)	25(32.9)	48(70.6)	20(29.4)
Studies seem to be beyond to my capacities.	31(40.8)	45(59.2)	11(16.2)	57(83.8)
I postpone studies for examination time.	34(44.7)	42(55.3)	5(7.4)	63(92.6)
I feel that studies is burden.	18(23.7)	58(76.3)	4(5.9)	64(94.1)
I am unable in continuing the tasks related to study.	22(28.9)	54(71.1)	5(7.4)	63(92.6)
I am unable to give answers to all questions in the exams.	42(55.3)	34(44.7)	22(32.4)	46(67.6)
I write slowly.	48(63.2)	28(36.8)	19(27.9)	49(72.1)
I am afraid of studies.	19(25.0)	57(75.0)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
I find teaching methods in class room are boring.	18(23.7)	58(76.3)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
School hours seem long to me.	19(25.0)	57(75.0)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
My written and oral language is not good.	26(34.2)	50(65.8)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
I feel difficulty to understand my teacher's language.	24(31.6)	52(68.4)	10(14.7)	58(85.3)
My teacher's behavior seems to be bias.	21(27.6)	55(72.4)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
Behavior of my classmates is not good with me.	20(26.3)	56(73.7)	5(7.4)	63(92.6)

**Table 2: Percentage distribution of academic problems by gender at pre and post test**

Academic Reasons	Pre test (n=76)				Post test (n=68)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (37)	Girls (1)	Boys (37)	Girls (31)
I don't understand what teachers teach in the class.	17(37.8)	19(61.3)	28(62.2)	12(8.7)	5(13.5)	1(3.2)	32(86.5)	30(96.8)
I don't like few subjects that are why I am lagging behind.	22(48.9)	13(40.9)	23(51.1)	18(58.1)	18(48.6)	14(45.2)	19(51.4)	17(54.4)
I feel that some subjects are hard.	31(68.9)	20(64.5)	14(31.1)	11(35.5)	31(83.8)	17(54.8)	6(16.2)	14(45.2)
Studies seem to be beyond to my capacities.	18(40.0)	13(41.9)	27(60.0)	18(58.1)	5(13.5)	1(3.2)	32(86.5)	30(96.8)
I postpone studies for examination time.	22(48.9)	12(38.7)	23(51.1)	19(61.3)	3(8.1)	2(6.5)	34(91.9)	29(93.5)
I feel that studies are burden.	14(31.1)	4(12.9)	31(68.9)	27(87.1)	4(10.8)	-	33(89.2)	31(100.0)
I am unable in continuing the tasks related to study.	15(33.3)	7(22.6)	30(66.7)	24(77.4)	3(8.1)	2(6.5)	34(91.9)	29(93.5)
I am unable to give answers to all questions in the exams.	23(51.1)	19(61.3)	22(48.9)	12(15.8)	12(32.4)	10(2.3)	25(67.6)	21(97.7)
I write slowly.	29(64.4)	19(61.3)	16(35.6)	12(15.8)	13(35.1)	6(19.4)	24(64.9)	25(64.9)
I am afraid of studies.	11(24.4)	8(25.8)	34(75.6)	23(74.2)	2(5.4)	-	35(94.6)	31(100.0)
I find teaching methods in class room are boring.	13(28.9)	5(16.1)	32(71.1)	26(83.9)	2(5.4)	-	35(94.6)	31(100.0)
School hours seem long to me.	14(1.1)	5(16.1)	31(68.9)	26(83.9)	1(2.7)	1(3.2)	36(97.3)	30(96.8)
My written and oral language is not good.	17(37.8)	9(29.0)	28(62.2)	22(71.0)	8(21.6)	-	29(78.4)	31(100.0)
I feel difficulty to understand my teacher's language.	16(35.6)	8(25.8)	29(64.4)	23(74.2)	10(27.0)	-	27(73.0)	31(100.0)
My teacher's behavior seems to be bias.	11(24.4)	10(32.3)	34(75.6)	21(67.7)	4(10.8)	4(12.9)	33(89.2)	27(87.1)
Behavior of my classmates is not good with me.	12(26.7)	8(25.8)	33(73.3)	23(74.2)	4(10.8)	1(3.2)	33(89.2)	30(96.8)

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage*

counter parts. For boys it was very hard to study some subjects (68.9%), about 65 per cent write very slowly, postponing studies for examination time (48.9%), dislike some subjects (48.9%) and not having good language to communicate (37.8%). Majority of girls facing the problems like inability to understand what teachers teach in the class, unable to give answers to all questions in the exam and feeling that sometimes teachers behavior is bias when treating with other student. At post test, particularly among boys there was a drastic reduction in academic problems except the problem like some subjects are hard (83.8%). For understanding the subject, putting continuous effort by means of hard work, long hours of studying, extra classes, discussion with teachers, peers and in addition, interest and inner motivation to study from the student side is very much necessary to succeed. Similar results were found in the studies conducted by Umunadi (2009) and Garikai (2010) empirically examined the perception of both boys and girls on quoting reasons for poor academic performance of the school students. The findings indicated that there was a difference in academic performance of male and female students with male students quoted many reasons for their backwardness like disliking of difficult subjects, teacher's

favoritism; long hours of class, peer relation and extra tuition work were the most important factors hindering their study.

Regarding the familial reasons (Table 3), about 20-30 per cent of children at pre test perceived that, their home environment is not conducive for the study, family income and parents occupation disturbing their studies, parents and family members did not contributing much to their studies and lack of expected cooperation from family members together interfering in the academic achievement of the children. At post test, the children were showed lot of decrement in these problems. The intervention was found to be effective in reducing the familial problems which are hampering the child's academic achievement. Results were in line with study of Muola (2010) reported the positive relationship between parent's education and academic achievement of the students and concluding that educated parents can make study arrangements for their children to avoid academic backwardness in them. Nayak *et al.* (2017) reported that 88 per cent didn't receive any academic help from their parents. Lower education status of the father and unhappy family were found to predict poor scholastic performance in adolescents.

**Table 3: Familial problems of academically backward children at pre and post test**

Familial Reasons	Pre test (n=76)		Post test (n=68)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
My home environment is not conducive for studies.	14(18.4)	62(81.6)	7(10.3)	61(89.7)
My siblings disturb me in my studies.	7(9.2)	69(90.8)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
My family members engage me more in activities other than studies.	11(14.5)	65(85.5)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
I have to do other work due to financial constraints.	20(26.3)	56(73.7)	11(16.2)	57(83.8)
Actually my parents don't want that I should continue my studies.	13(17.1)	63(82.9)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
My family occupation interrupts me in my studies.	15(19.7)	61(80.3)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
Due to some family reasons I can't spare time for studies.	22(28.9)	54(71.1)	21(30.9)	47(69.1)
There is no contribution of my family members in my studies.	21(27.6)	55(72.4)	10(14.7)	58(85.3)
Due to lack of education, the expected cooperation from family members is lacking.	25(32.9)	51(67.1)	17(25)	51(75)
My studies are affected due to family disputes.	20(26.3)	56(73.7)	12(17.6)	56(82.4)
I can't study because of ill health of family members.	18(23.7)	58(76.3)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
Proper facilities for studies are not available in my home.	20(26.3)	56(73.7)	7(10.3)	61(89.7)
There is no inspiration and guidance in my home for studies.	13(17.1)	63(82.9)	5(7.4)	63(92.6)

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.*

Table 4 revealed the percentage distribution of familial problems by gender at pre and post test. In pre test more number of boys facing many problems in their family than girls. About 20-40 per cent of boys perceived their family environment as not conducive for learning, engaging them in income generating activities due to lack of money, lack of cooperation and encouragement from parents and family members, lack of facilities for study, lack of education and family disputes were the major contributing factors for their academic backwardness. At post test, to some extent the family problems were solved through intervention. Presence of parents during the intervention makes them more cooperative in their children studies. This result is line with studies conducted by Singh and Praveen (2010) studied the relationship of

social maturity with academic achievement of high school students. Results revealed that girls were found to be more socially mature than boys. Therefore instead of feeling uncomfortable due to their family problems girls cope up themselves to activate themselves in all the areas and this might be the reason for not reasoning more familial factors as risk factors for their academic backwardness by girls.

Health problems of academically backward children at pre and post test is given under the Table 5. At pre test, around 30-40 per cent of children showed very few health problems such as worry, tension and stress during study, tiredness due to the long distance of school from home, lack of concentration, headache and restlessness

**Table 4: Percentage distribution of familial problems by gender at pre and post test**

Familial Reasons	Pre test (n=76)				Post test (n=68)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (37)	Girls (1)	Boys (37)	Girls (31)
My home environment is not conducive for studies.	11(24.4)	3(9.7)	34(75.6)	28(90.3)	7(18.9)	1(2.7)	30(81.1)	30(97.3)
My siblings disturb me in my studies.	4(8.9)	3(9.7)	41(91.1)	28(90.3)	6(16.2)	4(10.8)	31(83.8)	27(89.2)
My family members engage me more in activities other than studies.	6(7.9)	5(16.1)	9(86.7)	26(83.9)	2(5.4)	5(13.5)	35(94.6)	26(86.5)
I have to do other work due to financial constraints.	13(28.9)	7(22.6)	2(71.1)	24(77.4)	7(18.9)	4(10.8)	30(81.1)	27(89.2)
Actually my parents don't want that I should continue my studies.	6(13.3)	7(22.6)	39(86.7)	24(77.4)	-	3(8.1)	37(100.0)	28(91.9)
My family occupation interrupts me in my studies.	9(20.0)	6(19.4)	36(80.0)	25(80.6)	3(8.1)	5(13.5)	34(91.9)	26(86.5)
Due to some family reasons I can't spare time for studies.	15(33.3)	7(22.6)	30(62.7)	24(77.4)	15(40.5)	6(16.2)	22(59.5)	25(83.8)
There is no contribution of my family members in my studies.	10(22.2)	11(35.5)	35(77.8)	20(64.5)	10(27)	1(2.7)	27(73.0)	30(97.3)
Due to lack of education, the expected cooperation from family members is lacking.	18(40.0)	7(22.6)	27(60.0)	24(77.4)	14(37.8)	8(21.6)	23(62.2)	23(78.4)
My studies are affected due to family disputes.	11(24.4)	9(29.0)	34(75.6)	22(71.0)	8(21.6)	4(10.8)	29(78.4)	27(89.2)
I can't study because of ill health of family members.	9(20.0)	9(29.0)	36(80.0)	22(71.0)	5(13.5)	4(10.8)	32(86.5)	27(89.2)
Proper facilities for studies are not available in my home.	11(24.4)	9(29.0)	34(75.6)	22(71.0)	5(13.5)	2(5.4)	32(86.5)	29(94.6)
There is no inspiration and guidance in my home for studies.	8(17.8)	5(16.1)	37(82.2)	26(83.9)	2(5.4)	4(10.8)	35(94.6)	27(89.2)

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.*

**Table 5: Health problems of academically backward children at pre and post test**

Health Reasons	Pre test (n=76)		Post test (n=68)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
My frequent illness hinders my studies.	21(27.6)	55(72.4)	13 (19.1)	55(80.9)
Sufficient food is not available for me.	10(13.2)	66(86.6)	1 (1.5)	67(98.5)
Due to depression I am unable to study properly.	23(30.3)	53(69.7)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)
As my school is far from my home so I get tired.	31(40.8)	45(59.2)	29(42.6)	39(57.4)
Often I feel tired so I am unable to concentrate on my studies.	22(28.9)	54(71.1)	13 (19.1)	55(80.9)
My frequent absentia in school because of illness affects my studies.	19(25.0)	57(75.0)	19(27.9)	49(72.1)
I frequently suffer from headache.	25(32.9)	51(67.1)	12(17.6)	56(82.4)
I frequently suffer from stomach ache.	13(17.1)	63(82.9)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
I am unable to study properly because of vision problems.	12(15.8)	64(84.2)	5(7.4)	63(92.4)
I feel physically weak which affects my studies.	10(13.2)	66(86.2)	2(2.9)	66(97.1)
My studies are affected due to lack of concentration.	9(11.8)	67(88.2)	16(23.5)	52(76.5)
My studies are affected because of my worries and restlessness.	25(32.9)	51(67.1)	15(22.1)	53(77.9)
I am unable to hear properly in the class room.	13(17.1)	63(82.9)	8(11.8)	60(88.2)

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.*

**Table 6: Percentage distribution of health problems by gender at pre and post test**

Health Reasons	Pre test (n=76)				Post test (n=68)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (45)	Girls (31)	Boys (37)	Girls (1)	Boys (37)	Girls (31)
My frequent illness hinders my studies.	11(24.4)	10(32.3)	34(75.6)	21(67.7)	11(29.7)	2(5.4)	26(70.3)	29(94.6)
Sufficient food is not available for me.	6(13.3)	4(12.9)	9(86.7)	27(87.1)	1(2.7)	1(2.7)	36(97.3)	30(97.3)
Due to depression I am unable to study properly.	13(28.9)	10(32.3)	32(71.1)	21(67.7)	4(10.8)	4(10.8)	33(89.2)	27(89.2)
As my school is far from my home so I get tired.	19(42.2)	12(38.7)	26(57.8)	19(61.3)	13(35.1)	4(45.9)	24(64.9)	27(54.1)
Often I feel tired so I am unable to concentrate on my studies.	16(35.6)	6(19.4)	29(64.4)	25(80.6)	8(21.6)	5(13.5)	29(78.4)	26(86.5)
My frequent absentia in school because of illness affects my studies.	11(24.4)	8(25.8)	34(75.6)	23(74.2)	18(48.6)	2(5.4)	19(51.4)	29(94.6)
I frequently suffer from headache.	11(24.4)	6(19.4)	34(75.6)	25(80.6)	7(18.9)	6(16.2)	30(81.1)	25(83.8)
I frequently suffer from stomach ache.	19(42.2)	5(16.1)	26(57.8)	26(83.9)	2(5.4)	1(2.7)	35(94.6)	30(97.3)
I am unable to study properly because of vision problems.	8(17.8)	3(9.7)	37(82.2)	28(90.3)	2(5.4)	6(16.2)	35(94.6)	25(83.8)
I feel physically weak which affects my studies.	9(20.0)	3(9.7)	36(80.0)	28(90.3)	2(5.4)	2(5.4)	35(94.6)	29(94.6)
My studies are affected due to lack of concentration.	6(13.3)	13(41.9)	39(86.7)	18(58.1)	13(35.1)	3(8.1)	24(64.9)	28(91.9)
My studies are affected because of my worries and restlessness.	23(51.1)	7(22.6)	22(48.9)	24(77.4)	7(18.9)	9(24.3)	30(81.1)	22(75.7)
I am unable to hear properly in the class room.	10(22.9)	24(77.4)	35(77.8)	7(22.6)	6(16.2)	2(5.4)	31(83.8)	29(94.6)

*Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage.*

making the child to underachieve in the school. At post test, more number of the children made arrangements for their daily school attendance like coming to the school by bus or by riding bicycle, so it was help them to save the time, energy and make them more lively during the classes. Therefore, it was possible for them to attend the classes with more eagerness and make them able to concentrate on the studies. Chronic medical illnesses were found to be more in children with scholastic backwardness. It is well established that children with chronic illnesses have poor academic functioning compared to healthy children. Nayak *et. al* reported that the students who suffered from acute disease within fifteen days before examination and who had had fever showed poor performance in the school examination. Low achievement is not simply a result of school absenteeism due to the illness, but due to the inherent aspects of the illness. Children with chronic illnesses and the added disadvantage of low socioeconomic status are at particular risk for poor school achievement. It emphasizes the importance of providing educational support to children with health problems.

Table 6 discussing the gender difference with respect to health problems. Both boys and girls were suffering from very few health problems like tension, headache, poor concentration and acute worry have major role in disturbing the academic achievement of the children. From the table it was concluded that both the groups are on par with each other at pre and post test.

### CONCLUSION

Academic backwardness is one of the common problem in the present scenario but it calls for the professionals help to overcome. It is the result of mixture of various reasons including school, familial and health aspects. These risk factors exploit child's innate capacities and does not register or show up educational success.

This builds up stress and tension in the child so his potentials may be burned up merely handling the stress. Result of the present study also reported the same trend that, combinations of above mentioned factors hinders the academic achievement of school going children and leads to backwardness in every facets of academics. Study results encouraging the early recognition and proper intervention at right age at right time. Hence there is need to educate the parents and teachers to work out on the child's academic achievement.

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