

Developing Self Efficacy in Socioeconomically Deprived Students - Interventional Possibilities for Teachers

Prof. (Dr.) S. V. Sudheer^[1]

Dr. Geetha Gopinath^[2]

Abstract:

Socioeconomic backwardness causes developmental deficits and children from deprived families are at a disadvantage as the lack of academic skills prevents these children from growing. In the year 2014 the SSLC results were 95.47 per cent of which 14802 secured A+, whereas the results of students from the SC/ST was only 89.52/84.30 per cent, Among SC/ST only 329/13 got A+/in all papers These figures emphasize the need for an intervention in the lives of such students. Self efficacy is one's self-judgment of personal capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specific tasks at designated levels, expend greater effort, and persevere in the face of adversity. Family socioeconomic status and self efficacy are positively correlated. Students who are socioeconomically deprived would have low self efficacy and problems related to this lead to their poor academic performance. Key factors in self efficacy include prior experiences, personal qualities, and social supports, self efficacy beliefs and student outcomes. Teachers' role in developing students' self-efficacy include goal setting, strategy training, modeling and feedback. Students who find difficulty in academics resist learning as they think that they lack the ability to succeed, have a low self efficacy towards academics Teachers could help students to succeed at tasks that they expect to fail. A systematic and consistent approach by the teachers involved in the lives of such socioeconomically backward students could go a long way in resolving the crisis faced by these children.

Key words: socioeconomic deficits, academic backwardness, self efficacy, teacher's role.

I. INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic backwardness is the bane of any nation or community and constitutes the greatest cause of developmental deficits of a nation. Landlessness and impoverishment are still common in rural India though India is a fast developing nation. Kerala occupies the highest rank in human development index in India, as also Kerala is one of the few states that has implemented land reforms. Despite these facts according to a survey conducted by KILA (Kerala Institute of Local Administration), 55% of the population from the scheduled castes, are living in an appalling condition in 26,198 colonies and 71,368 persons are completely destitute. The study also revealed that 64.77% have education below 10th standard and just 0.09% have been able to get any professional education. (Aneesh, 2014).

Considering these facts it is only a foregone conclusion that children from such deprived families would be disadvantaged in their efforts for an upwardly mobile life experience. Various deficits added to the lack of academic skills due to their socio-economic contexts prevent these children from growing despite having good cognitive capacities like other children from better backgrounds. This can be understood if we were to examine the results of the 2014 SSLC examinations. The Hindu daily reported the SSLC and plus two exam results in Kerala as follows : The success rate in 2014 touched 95.47 per cent, an increase of 1.3 percentage points over the last year's figure. This year, 14,802 students secured A+ in all subjects. As many as 89.52

per cent of the Scheduled Caste candidates gained eligibility for higher studies and 329 got A+ in all papers. Among Scheduled Tribe students, the pass percentage was 84.30 and 13 got A+ grade. Among OBC candidates, the pass percentage was 95.96 and 8,438 got A+ in all subjects (The Hindu, , Thiruvananthapuram, 17th April, 2014). Some aspects that emerge from these reports are as follows:

1. The overall success rate was 95.47 per cent, whereas the Scheduled Castes and scheduled tribes percentage were only 89.52 and 84.30 percent respectively. This would mean that the other students performed better but the overall percentage was pulled down by the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes lower pass percentage.
2. The overall A+ figure was 14802 of which the Scheduled Castes were only 329 and the Scheduled Tribes only 13.

These figures emphasize the need for an evaluation of the status of the academic process and intervention in the lives of such students to enable these less privileged students to do better so as to reach their optimum achievement levels based on their intrinsic capabilities. In fairness to equitable justice values, the above argument is applicable to all students irrespective of creed, class, caste, tribe or gender. Two cases are presented below for clarity:

- a. 'A' failed his twelfth grade final in 2015 and is the son of a higher caste laborer. His mother suffers from an autoimmune disorder and also had cancer.

^[1]Professor – Director, UGC- Human Resource Development Centre , University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram - 695 581, Kerala, India, Email: drsvsudheer@hotmail.com

^[2]HOD, M.Ed Department, Mar Severios College of Teacher Education, Chengaroor. P.O, Mallappally, Pathanamthitta (Dt), Kerala - 689594, India, Email: drgeethagopinath@gmail.com

There are four children in the family. They do not own land and live in a rented house. They have to shift house as and when the owner tells them to vacate. The father also has an alcohol problem and is not regular in his employment due to his drinking as also due to the lack of employment. This also restricts his ability to provide food for the family. The children especially the younger two are in constant quarrels due to the lack of proper food and clothing. The mother was hospitalized during the period 'A' had to appear for his exams.

- b. 'B' passed her twelfth grade with 79.9% marks in humanities. She has a sibling who has passed her tenth grade and they belong to a Cheramar Christian community. Her parents are educated up to the fifth grade and father also has a drinking problem. They live with their grandparents in a small house that has three small rooms and is cluttered with furniture. The house is situated in a colony type surrounding where there is hardly any privacy or quietness.

These students could have done much better than they have performed but for the particular contexts in which they are placed. The contexts of these students are debilitating and teachers who are the guideposts for these students could have played a more proactive role in their lives. The proactive role that teachers can play is best possible through the process of developing self efficacy in students. Self efficacy is a concept developed by Albert Bandura who developed the social learning theory

Self efficacy as a key to performance improvement

Bandura has defined self efficacy as one's self-judgment of personal capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specific tasks at designated levels, expend greater effort, and persevere in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1986). Three factors that Bandura emphasized as requisites for self efficacy are listed below:

- a. It is one's self-judgment of personal capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specific tasks
- b. It involves investment of greater effort
- c. It involves perseverance in the face of adversity

Again Bandura has stated, "The self-beliefs that individuals use to exercise a measure of control over their environments include self efficacy beliefs." Also, self beliefs are "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). These factors that Bandura stated are:

- a. Self efficacy beliefs are beliefs in one's capability
- b. To organize and execute the courses of action

In a Chinese study, Jing Han, Xiaoyuan Chu, Huicun Song, Yuan Li (2014) have reached the following conclusions regarding socioeconomic status and self efficacy : (1) The family socio-economic status as well as all its dimensions (father's degree of education, mother's degree of education, the total annual income of the family, father's occupation, mother's occupation) is significantly positively related to social capital and all the dimensions of its proxy variable (peer support, kinship support and general support of others); (2) There is a significant positive correlation between the family socio-economic status as well as all its dimensions and

self-efficacy; the socio-economic status, with its dimensions, is the predictive variable of self-efficacy.

Considering the above findings it is fair to assume that most students who are socioeconomically deprived would have low self efficacy and problems related to this that lead to their poor performance. However, it is also a fact that self efficacy can be developed with the collaboration of the agencies involved in their lives especially parents and teachers. A key to getting struggling learners with low self-efficacy to invest sufficient effort, to persist on tasks, to work to overcome difficulties, to take on increasingly challenging tasks, and to develop interest in academics—is for teachers to systematically stress the development of high self-efficacy (Margolis & McCabe (2004).

As a teacher educator this presenter firmly believes that appropriate and timely intervention to develop self efficacy in these deprived students could have enabled them to do better than they actually have. This paper focusing on the development of self efficacy is a modest presentation for enabling teachers to alleviate the academic performance of such students.

Summarizing the concepts developed by Bandura we get the core facets of self efficacy. It involves a self judgment of personal capabilities requiring greater effort and perseverance based on self efficacy beliefs to organize and execute the courses of action. In the case of students featured above the tactical analysis of their condition would involve a proper analysis of their environment, resources, options and best possible solutions in their contexts. However, this intervention would call for a greater involvement of the teacher in the life of the student. This would also require the teacher to be more approachable and for the student to be more in communication with an approachable teacher or school counselor who could mediate with the class teacher to provide options.

Key factors in self efficacy

Prior experiences, personal qualities, and social supports

Schunk and Pajares (2002), state that prior experiences, personal qualities and social supports are determinants for the level of students self-efficacy. The extent that parents and teachers encourage students to learn, facilitate access to resources necessary for learning, and teach them self regulatory strategies that enhance skill acquisition and refinement determine the social support available for the child. In addition the parental aspirations for the child influence his/her academic achievements both directly and indirectly by influencing children's self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli, 1996). As students engage in activities, they are affected by personal (e.g., goal setting, information processing) and situational influences (e.g., rewards, teacher feedback) that provide students with cues about how well they are learning. Self-efficacy is enhanced when students perceive they are performing well or becoming more skillful. Lack of success or slow progress will not necessarily lower self-efficacy if learners believe they can perform better by expending more effort or using more effective strategies (Schunk, 1995).

Self efficacy beliefs and student outcomes

Research on Self efficacy beliefs have focused on studies of academic motivation and of self-regulation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995) involving three areas. The first area explored the link between efficacy beliefs and college major and career choices, particularly in science and mathematics (Lent & Hackett, 1987). The second area dealt with findings that the efficacy beliefs of teachers are related to their instructional practices and to various student outcomes (Ashton & Webb, 1986). In research relating to the third area it was discovered that students' self-efficacy beliefs are correlated with other motivation constructs and with students' academic performances and achievement. These constructs included attributions, goal setting, modeling, problem solving, test and domain-specific anxiety, reward contingencies, self-regulation, social comparisons, strategy training, other self-beliefs and expectancy constructs, and varied academic performances across domains. Of the areas considered the last two areas are of relevance viz, i. Self efficacy beliefs of teachers-their instructional practices and ii. Student's self efficacy beliefs-motivational constructs like attribution, goal setting etc.

Sources of self efficacy

Bandura, (1997) & Pajares, (1997), state that people develop their self - perceptions of efficacy from four major sources of experiences.

Mastery experience: This is the way in which people assess their own personal attainment in a given area. Where they view that they have been successful in the past they develop a high sense of confidence about their abilities and where they view that they have been unsuccessful they are likely to have feelings of doubts and uncertainty about their own effectiveness.

Vicarious experience (observational): This is based on the self-evaluation that individuals derive from observing and comparing themselves with a given „social model“ (classmate, a friend etc). Students observe a given model who they feel are compatible with them in terms of traits and skills succeeding at a given task, they are likely to feel that they too can fulfill a similar task. Similarly, a model failing at a given task would have the opposite effect.

Verbal persuasions: Verbal and tacit outputs by significant persons in the person's life can be influential in formation of personal concepts. These outputs could also be nonverbal.

Physiological states: self-efficacy estimates might also be affected by “somatic and emotional states” (Bandura, 1993). It is not the negative emotions such as stress, anxiety or fear that negatively affects performance; rather it is the incorrect interpretations that students make about the states. Students may wrongly interpret normal anxiety about academics as their own incompetence and inefficiency.

Teachers' Role in Developing Students' Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1986) considers self efficacy as a ‘malleable construct’ that could be enhanced through providing students with motivational assistance and guidance. It also has to do with responsiveness to variation in personal experience and attainment and its sensitivity to teaching techniques and instructional strategies (Zimmerman 2000). Thus teachers have a crucial role to play in improving the self efficacy in

students through training them to make use of a variety of learning strategies such as goal setting, strategy training, modeling and feedback (Schunk, 1995).

Goal setting: Students need to be aware of the goals that they have to achieve and timely, appropriate feedback on goal progress needs to be given to them. Goal setting should be proximal (near in time) as otherwise it may lead to procrastination. Goal setting should be realistic taking into consideration the various contextual factors that can hamper progress as also by developing strategies to mitigate the burdens. In the cases discussed above the students could be helped to set goals taking into consideration the various factors that could affect his/her ability to study. The responsibility of taking care of the mother was with the student and he needed strategies where he could be able to study while at the same time fulfill his responsibilities to his family. His goals would have to be defined considering the contextual situation of his family. The teacher could intervene to get the student help so that he could get a facilitated environment to do his studies in a hostel environment and care-giving needs of his mother could be shared by others in the extended family or through other social support systems. Goals could be set for the day/week/month and appraisals could be made of progress. This would enable the student to progressively finish his studies in the school environment where he would be in a better position to learn his subjects.

Strategy training: Teachers could develop instructional programs that train students on the use of certain strategies to improve their performance. Strategies should be developed considering the contextual factors like the home environment, the factual situation the family. Time management strategies could be developed so that the student would be able to get quality time for study while at the same time undertaking home responsibilities could be evolved. Time - management help students to become better self-regulators i.e., more able to organize “strategically“ their own study schedules and to balance thus between their academic and other areas of life. Students could be taught how to make schedules when they get engaged in problems. They could learn how to make an estimation of time requirement, an appraisal of resources available and the choice of the adequate procedures to achieve their goals.

Learning strategies like verbalization or “think aloud“ procedures could help the student to encode and retian what he/she has learnt. (Schunk, 1995). The latter consists of having a student to explain verbally the different steps he /she follows at the moment of solving an activity .This might keep students alert to the basic elements of the task, activate their encoding and retention abilities, help them to be more systematic in their work and more in control of their learning. Teachers could also teach students ‘motivational control’ strategies involving self reinforcement and self imposed penance anticipating positive and negative outcomes, Emotion control strategies involving “self –talk strategies” for reducing anxiety that occurs during the learning process and environmental control strategies for developing “self–help strategies“ for controlling one's learning environment to deal with stimuli that could distract one's attention and motivation to learn. (Kerlin, 1992)

The cases mentioned above could be encouraged to develop time management strategies for dealing with the diverse problems that they face to ensure that time could be used positively to enhance their learning abilities. In the case of the student with sick mother he could be taught to 'be with the mother' at the hospital but 'with his subjects' at the intellectual level.

One learning strategy that would be very helpful involves sequencing materials and tasks from easy to difficult; modeling and explaining to struggling learners, in a simple step-by-step fashion what they need to do; providing feedback about what they are doing right and what they need to do differently (Margolis & McCabe (2004).

Modeling: Teachers could help students by modeling cognitive strategies and self-regulatory techniques (Zimmerman, 2000). These could be modeled by using peer models that have successfully used certain techniques as also by showing them models among great achievers who have overcome difficult and challenging situations to go forward in life. In the case of the students listed above life stories of persons like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and others who fought difficult circumstances and reached greatness would be tremendously motivating.

Feedback: Feedback is an important part of the process of developing self efficacy. Feedback should be constant, unbiased and based on a proper assessment of the student's academic achievement. Different types of feedback methods could be used : *effort feedback* which emphasizes students' effort like in: "you have been working hard"; *ability feedback* which stresses students' ability such as " you are good at this" ; *performance feedback* which indicates that students are making progress in their learning like "you are making progress". (Schunk, 1995) Attributional feedback could also be given to the students so that students could develop "healthy attributions" about their performance. By providing "attributional feedback" to students, that is, relating their academic attainment to the perceived causes underlying it, teachers would encourage them to view ability as a "controllable" and a "changeable" aspect of development. (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Proper feedback about 'where' the student is situated academically, how he/she is using the various strategies and facilities as best suited for his academic needs could help the student to deal with his/her problems in a more positive manner. Regular feedback that accentuates the achievements and suggests options for improvement could motivate the student to perform better.

It has been recognized that students who find difficulty in academics resist learning as they think that they lack the ability to succeed. They have a low self efficacy towards academics and without high self efficacy or the belief that they can succeed on academic tasks, students may not make the effort to master academics (Casteel, Isom, and Jordan 2000). This kind of perspective has to be reversed and teachers are the pivots for this to be achieved. Teachers could help students to succeed at tasks that they expect to fail. This approach would encourage students to take up more challenging tasks as they are motivated to try harder having tasted success at some level.

II. CONCLUSION

The recent 2015 class X and plus two results show that Kerala is far ahead of the other states in the level of performance. However good the results may be statistically, the fact remains that children from backward socioeconomic families are on the fault line as regards furthering their education is concerned. Such children do not get the necessary guidance or the financial back up for academic progress. The children are eager to learn but without the economic, social or academic background they are lost in the woods with no direction to join the mainstream of national development. The only persons who have the direct opportunity to intervene in the lives of such children are the persons in the teaching profession. A systematic and consistent approach by the teachers involved in the lives of such socioeconomically backward students could go a long way in resolving the crisis that these children who are less fortunate due to the play of circumstances. Each child is a possibility and when a child loses opportunity it is the possibility that is lost. We in the field of academics owe it to future generations that none of these possibilities are left groping for no fault of theirs.

This paper is only an introduction into the possibilities that exist for a teacher who has understood the connotations of self efficacy. He/She will hopefully try to incorporate the essence of self efficacy in his/her life journey with the future generations of our nation.

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