

Adolescents' use of Self-Handicapping strategies in Academic context

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Abstract:

In the present study, it is attempted to assess the use of Self-handicapping strategies in the academic context among secondary students of Mysuru district. This is a descriptive research survey method is used in the study. The Academic Self-Handicapping Scale developed by the researcher is used in the study. Descriptive statistics are used. The results showed that almost all students engaged themselves in self-handicapping behaviour at various levels in their learning context. It was found that boys engaged more in self-handicapping than girls. It was also found that students in schools of urban areas used more Self-handicapping strategies than students from schools in rural areas. The implications for teachers to bring in a reduction in the use of Self-handicapping strategies among adolescents are discussed.

Key words.: Academic Self-handicapping, Adolescents, Academic context, Educational Implications

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I. INTRODUCTION

The system of Education aims at achieving a healthy balance among all the domains – Cognitive, Affective and Psychomotor domains. The experiences that are to be provided to students have been crafted assigning due weight age to the development of all these domains. Each of these domains influences each other strongly and results in overall development of the individual. Different components shape the development of an individual during childhood and continue to influence what they become as adults. Education focuses more on a socially contrived phenomenon wherein the environmental settings, psychological constructs, interact with each other to achieve desirable changes in individuals.

In the process of Education, though all-round development is given importance, the success in education through learner's achievement also is given equal emphasis. Equipping learners with ability to cope positively with demands of society is also an objective of providing education. Since most of the interactions happen through classroom transaction, it is influenced by various factors that hinder or promote effectiveness of learning in students. These factors have their roots in psychological or sociological constructs. It thus becomes responsibility of teachers to understand the interaction effect of these factors on learning and adapt suitable teaching strategies for classroom transaction.

The behaviour of self – handicapping has been considered as a self-protective strategy, used by all, especially adolescents in different situations assessed as threatening the positive self- esteem. Self-handicapping behaviour involves creating obstacles/impediments to performance to protect or enhance one's perceived competence (Berglas & Jones, 1978). This behaviour provides opportunity to protect the individual's fragile image, to externalize failure and internalize success.

Academic Self-Handicapping

Self-Handicapping differs from simply making external

attributions for failure. The difference lies in the fact that self-handicapping is a pro-active strategy employed before the task is performed. Until adolescence, learners do not recognise the perception of others. The phenomenon of egocentric ideation that takes place in this stage makes adolescents feel that they are being observed by others around them. These situations have more potential in posing a threat to self-esteem of students. Under these circumstances, students employ themselves in self-handicapping to protect their self-esteem.

In learning contexts, Self-handicapping occurs in any situation that involves an ability-diagnostic activity. Schools and classrooms provide ample contexts for examining self-handicapping behaviour as in such settings, students are continually confronted with tasks and situations in which information about their ability and intelligence is on public display.

This behaviour of self-handicapping occurs in individuals in all domains but demands a significant attention as academic achievement reflects on a value-added characteristic-Intelligence. Students, especially during adolescence worry much about them appearing unintelligent if they poorly perform on a specific task assigned to them. In addition, students' performance on these tasks has consequences for relevant outcomes (their performance results, future education and job prospects). The presence of teachers and peers in achievement situations allow for frequent opportunities to manipulate perception of others, a primary goal of self-handicappers. Schools thus provide an ample opportunity for examining both self-handicapping dispositions of individuals and possible contextual influences on self-handicapping behaviour. Academic self-handicapping represents a frequently used strategy for regulating the threat to self-esteem elicited by the fear of failing in academic achievement settings. There are many

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studies that have documented negative associations between self-handicapping and academic achievement. The analyses also showed that the type of the measuring scale, the school type (Middle school, high school) influenced the correlation between self-handicapping and academic achievement (Schwinger, et.al.,2014).

II. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

It is unhealthy for students to use self-handicapping behaviour to cover up their shortcomings and thereby protecting their self-esteem. This does not prove to be effective and healthy in the long run, instead tend to be negatively affecting the personality. It is agreed upon by many researchers that Self-concept is formed by an individual's experiences and interaction with the environment (Bong & Clark,1999; Bong & Skaalvik,2003; Marsh and Shavelson,1985) where "significant others" play an important role (Sanchez & Roda, 2003; Shavelson et al.,1976).These 'significant others' can be the parents, teachers, family members, relatives or peers. Usually significant factors that influence students' self-concept are parents (Burns, 1982) all of which interact and influence their academic achievement.

School influence is very important in developing students personality as the process of socialization at home should be further carried out in schools. Teachers have direct influence on child's feelings, inspirations, attitude and thereby influence academic achievement. It is also found that peer support is also associated with high self-concept

(Hirsch & Rapkin,1987). Students' perception about their academic capabilities forms an important part of their adjustment and carrying out tasks in school. These self-perceptions play a significant role in directing students' efforts towards their academic work. If these perceptions turn out to be negative, students do not put in effort to do the task and instead try to blame circumstances or external sources for not having done the task. Students engage in self-handicapping for the sake of impression management (Kolditz & Arkin,1982). When individuals fear or expect failure at certain tasks that are significant to them, they engage in practices that increase the probability of failure, so they can have an excuse, other than lack of ability, for the failure.

Self-handicapping behaviour occurs in any situation that involves an ability-diagnostic activity. Schools and classroom provide excellent real world contexts for examining self-handicapping behaviour in such-settings, students are continually confronted with tasks and situations. It is also necessary that teachers assess self-handicapping behaviours among students. It is in this context, this study is carried out to know the extent of Academic self-handicapping behaviour(ASHB) among secondary students.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researchers have raised the following research questions which have been answered in the present study

Research Questions

- What is the extent of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students?

- Does the use of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students vary with respect to gender?
- Does the locale of the school influence the use of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students?

In order to answer the above research questions, the following objectives have been developed and achieved in the present study.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the prevalence of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students
- To compare the prevalence of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students with respect to gender
- To compare the prevalence of Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students with respect to the locale of school.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following hypotheses have been generated and tested in the study.

Hypotheses of the Study

- Majority of secondary students engage in Academic self-handicapping behaviour
- There is no significant difference in the Academic Self-handicapping behaviour of boys and girls at secondary level.
- There is no significant difference in the Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students with respect to the locale of school.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Design & Sample

The present study has used descriptive survey method aiming at finding out the use of Academic Self-handicapping Behaviour among secondary students. The sample of the study comprised 1679 students, of which 835 boys and 844 girls studying in class 9 of Govt. schools from both urban and rural areas of Mysuru district. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling technique from 26 schools spanning across 9 educational blocks of Mysuru district.

Instrumentation

The 'Academic Self-handicapping Behaviour Scale' was developed by the researcher. The scale had 5 sub-dimensions which were considered to predict Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students. The scale developed has 45 items and has 5 alternative choices for every item. This Likert type of response anchor was used to know the frequency with which an individual engages in the Academic Self-Handicapping behaviour. The reliability of the scale was established to be 0.889 and that of the translated version is found to be 0.837.

Statistical Techniques Used

The researcher has employed percentage analysis and t- test to analyse the data.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The collected data were scored, tabulated and their descriptive statistics were calculated. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, data is analysed and interpreted as below in the following sections. The obtained results are presented and discussed as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Majority of secondary students engage in Academic self-handicapping behaviour

In order to test above hypothesis, the scores obtained by students were grouped into 5 categories. The details are given in the table below:

Table 1: Level of Academic Self-handicapping among students

Level of Academic Self-handicapping	N of students	Percentage
Extreme low self-handicapping	0	0.0
Low average self-handicapping	318	18.9
Average self-handicapping	1072	63.8
High average self-handicapping	277	16.5
Extreme high self-handicapping	12	0.7

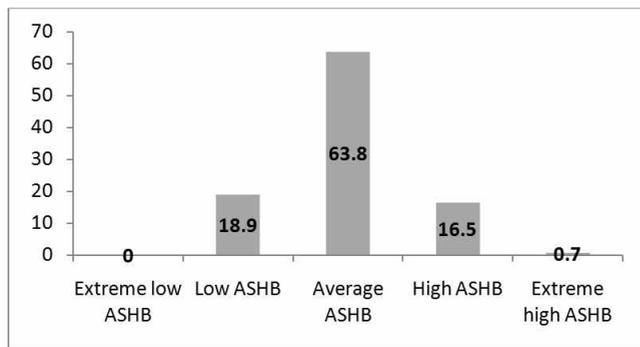


Figure 1: Level of Academic Self-handicapping among students

An analysis of the above table and figure e indicates that all students engage themselves in Academic self-handicapping behaviour, but at varying levels. Most of them (63.8%) were average self-handicappers followed by 18.9% of them were low-average self-handicappers, 16.5% of them were high average self-handicappers and very less (0.7%) of them engaged in extremely high Academic self-handicapping behaviour. But it is very clear that most of students engaged themselves in academic self-handicapping behaviour to an average extent but to be noticed is every student had a tendency to self-handicap under various situations and for different reasons. Since the analysed data shows that all students have engaged themselves in Self-handicapping behaviour at different levels, the above hypothesis can be accepted. It means that all students have a tendency to self-handicap owing to different reasons. This could be due to the need to protect their self-esteem in presence of their peers thereby protecting their self-worth. Also, adolescents do not want to exhibit their incapability in carrying out a specific task that might let others undermine their capacities. Though self-handicapping brings in temporary benefits to an individual, it protects the self-esteem for a while by externalizing the causes for failure and internalizing success.

In an academic context, there is much scope for students to engage in self-handicapping. There are many situations for

public evaluation like the presentation of the work in public that is judged by peers and teachers, competitions and rewards etc., Engaging in self-handicapping behaviour increases in a situation that is evaluative in nature. Unless the student is prepared to face the situation confidently irrespective of the outcome, it compels an individual to engage in this behaviour. This behaviour also enhances with some other variables such as increased task importance (Shepperd & Arkin, 1989), ego relevance (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1983) and the presence of audiences (Hirt, McCrea, Kimble, 2000) by making the performance more important and threatening to the individual. Also, the non-contingent success (Berglas & Jones, 1978) and uncertain self-esteem (Harris & Snyder, 1986) leads an individual to feel less confident and thus prompt one to engage in self-handicapping behaviour.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the Academic Self-handicapping behaviour of boys and girls at secondary level.

In order to test the above hypothesis the mean scores obtained by boys and girls on Academic Self-handicapping scale was computed apart from the computation of SD and SE. Further the significance of the difference between mean scores of both genders was computed using 't' test which yielded the following.

Table 2: Significance of the difference between Boys & Girls on Academic Self-Handicapping Behaviour

Independent sample t-test							
Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.	Inference
Boys	835	118.16	26.156	1679	9.65	0.00	Significant
Girls	844	106.52	23.183				

An analysis of the above table.2 indicates that there are 1679 students including boys and girls. The mean score of boys is 118.16, while that of girls is 106.52. Apparently, boys have an edge over girls. While, in terms of standard deviation, boys have 26.15 and girls is 23.18. It means the spread of scores away from the mean is apparently more among boys suggesting that the variation is more among boys as compared to girls. In order to see whether the obtained mean difference is true of the population also, the scores were subjected to 't' test, which has 9.65, which is statistically significant at 0.01 level. This statistically significant difference is in favour of boys. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It means boys and girls differ significantly on Academic Self-handicapping behaviour in favour of Boys as their mean score are higher than girls. It means boys significantly engage in self-handicapping behaviour academically than girls. This could be because of the societal stereotype wherein always boys are expected to outperform girls in all activities. To achieve this, boys usually might engage in self-handicapping behaviour. The obtained result is in concurrence with men appearing to handicap to a greater degree than women yet the reason for this remains elusive (Arkin & Oleson, 1998; Rhodewalt, 1990). In another study, it is found that men self-handicap more than women for the reason that of increased public self-focus and higher uncertainty (McCrea & Hirt, E, 2008).

Hypothesis 3: There will be no significant difference in the Academic Self-handicapping behaviour among secondary students with respect to the locale of school.

In order to test the above hypothesis the mean scores obtained by boys and girls on Academic Self-handicapping scale was computed apart from the computation of SD and SE. Further the significance of the difference between mean scores of students from both locale was computed using “t” test which yielded the following.

Table 3: Significance of the difference between students on Academic Self-Handicapping Behaviour with respect to locale of the school

Independent sample t-test							
Locale	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.	Inference
Urban	492	115.21	26.26	1677	3.63	0.002	Significant
Rural	1187	111.10	24.90				

An analysis of the above table.3 indicates that there are 1679 students from schools located in both urban and rural areas of Mysuru district. The mean score of urban students is 115.21, while that of rural students is 111.10. While, in terms of standard deviation, urban students have 26.26 and rural students is 24.90. It means the spread of scores away from the mean is apparently more among urban students suggesting that the variation is more among urban students as compared to that of rural students. In order to see whether the obtained mean difference is true of the population also, the scores were subjected to ‘t’ test, the value is 3.63, which is statistically significant at 0.002 level. This statistically significant difference is in favour of urban students. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It means students from urban and rural background differ significantly on Academic Self-handicapping behaviour in favour of urban students as their mean scores are higher than rural students. It means urban students significantly engage in self-handicapping behaviour academically than rural students. This could be because of the excessive significance attached to obtaining higher grades, compete academically and score better than fellow students/peers that might make students engage in this behaviour. Also parents, teachers and societal expectations bring in an element of comparison and competition among students more so in the urban areas that might lead students to employ more of this behaviour to protect their self-esteem.

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study revealed that all students engage in Academic self-handicapping behaviour at varying levels. It is also found that boys engage more in Academic Self-handicapping behaviour than girls. Also, urban students engage more in Academic Self-handicapping than rural students.

VII. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Since it is seen from the results and supporting review studies that all students engage in academic self-handicapping behaviour, teachers can help students to reduce this behaviour and teach them to engage in healthier ways of protecting self-esteem. It can be done by deemphasizing peer-comparison and competition in classroom among

students. Teachers can also help students focus on individual growth, improvement and comprehension of the academic matter, explicitly support student autonomy and intrinsic motivation to carry out the tasks. Also, learners should be made aware of intelligence as a modifiable characteristic that could be improved through efforts and students be recognised for strategies they employ to be successful at the task instead of simply praising them. Teachers and parents can secure individual’s self-esteem through self-affirmation and this will hold well only when the affirmation focuses on a domain other than the one that is being threatened. The role of teacher and parents become seminal in understanding the prevalence of Academic Self-handicapping among their students and help students to overcome and help them further become a confident individual.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Since Academic Self-handicapping behaviour is much prevalent among students, it implies the need to develop educational interventions that focus explicitly on reducing self-handicapping among students. Students can be motivated to take up more responsibility for their learning and engage in a dialogue that helps them in their holistic development.

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