STUDYING ACADEMIC ANXIETY IN RELATION TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF LEARNERS AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF NEP-2020

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Abstract

The present research was conducted to study the academic anxiety of secondary school learners and its relationship with their academic achievement. The study also suggests ways for managing academic anxiety in the light of recommendations of India's National Education Policy-2020. For the present study data were collected from a sample of 300 learners studying in different secondary schools of District Lucknow using Simple random sampling technique. T-Test and Pearson's product moment correlation were the statistical techniques used for data analysis. Results revealed a significant difference in the academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender. As compared to male learners, female learners exhibited higher level of academic anxiety and lower academic achievement. Additionally, the correlation analysis revealed a significant and a negative correlation between academic anxiety and academic achievement of learners.

Keywords: Academic anxiety, academic achievement, secondary school learners and NEP-2020.

Introduction: Learners during their adolescence phase are sensitive to a range of mental health issues and academic anxiety is one of them. Academic anxiety may be defined as a state of intense fears, nervousness, and uneasiness arising due to academic situations. Rehman et al. (2020) in their study, mention that students experience more stress and anxiety than persons in other professions. Learners with mental illness may face difficulty in school adjustment, have low concentration, poor achievement, may experience problematic relationships, health risks, school dropout and even expulsion (Cavioni et.al. 2021). Further, it has also been found that academic anxiety negatively affects the academic performance of learners (Khesht-Masjedi et. al., 2019). The state of academic anxiety of learners may have deteriorated during the upsurge of

Covid-19 pandemic. Studies like Chhetri et.al.(2021); Siakalli et.al., (2022) noted a rise in anxiety of learners amid Covid-19 pandemic.

Considering the state of physical and psychological health, India's National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 which has come into existence after 34 years from previous 1986 National Policy on Education emphasized the mental and physical-wellbeing of learners (Patil, 2022a). The NEP (2020) mentions that the aim of education is not only confined to enhancing learner's cognitive ability but also to develop their character and produce well-rounded people equipped with 21st century skills. For promoting holistic development of learners, the Ministry of Education (MoE) launched "Manodarpan" which means "Mirror of mind" on 21st July 2020. It is an initiative channelized through NEP-2020 to address mental health concerns and provide psychosocial support to learners, teachers, and families during Covid-19 pandemic and beyond (Patil, 2022b). With respect to the vision of NEP-2020 the 'Manodarpan' initiative conducted a survey on mental health of learners. The survey report titled "Mental Health and Well-being of School Learners- A Survey, 2022" revealed a high percentage of responses on protective factors for mental health however, a concerning trend was observed in context of academic anxiety and frequent mood swings of learners.

It may be said that academic anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern experienced by the majority of learners. The present research is an effort to study the academic anxiety secondary school learners in relation to their academic achievement and suggests its management in the light of National Education Policy-2020. NEP-2020 endeavors to promote holistic development of the learners so that they become productive members of society. If school authorities and parents actively participate in promoting good mental health practices among learners, this vision may be successfully realized.

Objectives of the study:

1. To compare the difference in the mean scores of academic anxiety of secondary school learners on the basis of gender.
2. To compare the difference in the mean scores of academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender.
3. To study the correlation between academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners.

Hypotheses:

$H_0$1. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic anxiety of secondary school learners on the basis of gender.

$H_0$2. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender.

$H_0$3. There is no significant correlation between academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners.

Methodology

Variables of the Study: Academic anxiety and Academic achievement.

Sample: A sample of 300 learners studying in secondary school of District Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh was selected using Simple random sampling techniques.

Research Tool:

Academic Anxiety Scale developed by Siddiqui & Rehman (2017).

The percentage of marks secured by learners in the last exam was considered as the academic achievement of the learner.

Statistical Techniques: t-Test and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

Analysis and Interpretation:

1. The first objective was to study the difference in the mean scores of academic anxiety of secondary school learners on the basis of gender. Data analysis was done using t-Test and the results are given in Table 1.

   Table 1

   Gender-wise N, M, SD, and t-value of academic anxiety of secondary school learners

Groups	N	M	SD	t-value	d	Remark
Male learners	152	74.36	12.478	3.92	0.45	$p<0.01$
Female learners	148	79.89	11.905			Significant

Interpretation: Table 1 unveils that the t-value is 3.92 which is significant at 0.01 level with df= 298. This indicates a significant difference in the mean scores of academic anxieties of secondary school learners with respect to gender. Therefore, the H_01 that, "There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic anxiety of secondary school learners on the basis of gender" is rejected. Additionally, the mean score of females 79.89 is higher than that of males whose mean score is 74.36. Hence, it may be said that female secondary school learners were found to be more academically anxious as compared to male learners. Further, the value of effect size (d= 0.45) denotes a medium effect size. Thus, gender was found to have a medium effect on academic anxiety.

2. The second objective was to study the difference in the mean scores of academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender. The results of the t-Test are given in Table 2.

Table 2

N, M, SD, and t-value of academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender:

Groups	N	M	SD	t-value	D	Remark
Male learners	152	79.14	12.226	3.02	0.34	p<0.01
Female learners	148	75.16	10.506			Significant

Interpretation: From the results given in Table 2 it is evident that the t-value 3.02 is significant at 0.01 level with df= 298. This indicates a significant difference in the mean scores of academic achievement of male and female secondary school learners. Thus, the H_02 that "There is no significant difference in the mean scores of academic achievement of secondary school learners on the basis of gender" is rejected. Additionally, male learner's mean score 79.14is higher than female learner's mean score which is 75.16. Hence, it shows that male learners have better academic achievement than their counterparts. Further, the value of effect size (d= 0.34) denotes a moderate effect size. Thus, gender was found to have a moderate effect on academic achievement.

3. The third objective was to study the correlation between the academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners. The result of correlation analysis is mentioned in Table 3:

Table 3

Correlation coefficient between academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners:

Variables	R	Remark
Academic anxiety		
Academic achievement	-.485**	p<0.01

**Significant at 0.01 level

Interpretation: Table 3 reveals that the correlation coefficient (r) between academic anxiety and academic achievement is -.485 which is negative and significant a 0.01 level with df=298. It indicates that academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners is significantly and negatively correlated. Thus, the H_03 that, "There is no significant correlation between academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners" is rejected. Further, the negative correlation reflects an inverse relationship which means higher the score of academic anxiety, lower will be the academic achievement of secondary school learners and vice-versa.

Discussion: The present study found a considerable difference in the academic anxiety and academic achievement of male and female secondary school learners. Female learners were found to have more academic anxiety as compared to male learners. Similar findings were reported by other studies like Kecojevic (2020); Verma (2020);Prouse et al., (2021). Another finding of the study revealed that male learners had better academic achievement as compared to female learners. The finding corroborates with the findings of Kumar et al., (2019) and Catherine (2020).

Since, the data for the present study was collected during reopening of schools after Covid-19 pandemic, it may be said that mental health of female learners was more profoundly affected as compared to males during pandemic (Kecojevic et. al., 2020). Female learner's higher level of academic anxiety may have been responsible for their low academic achievement. Moreover, during pandemic it has also been observed that females experienced increased domestic workload, fear of dropping out particularly in low-income households and the families that prioritize the education of male child over female, techno-stress in online learning environment etc., all of which may have contributed to their academic anxiety. Further, females are also

thought to have an anxious temperament (Sediri, 2020) which may have resulted in their higher levels of academic anxiety and lower academic achievement.

The current study also revealed a significant and negative relationship between academic anxiety and academic achievement of secondary school learners. The finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies like Azeem (2018); Narayanaswamy (2019); Choudhury and Chechi (2022). It may be said that effective management of learner's academic anxiety with the help of trained counsellors followed by creating congenial home and school environment may help in reducing academic anxiety of learners and subsequently improve their academic achievement.

Suggestions for Managing Academic Anxiety of Learners in the Light of Recommendations of National Education Policy-2020

The NEP-2020 aims at holistic development of the learners therefore, it takes into consideration physical and mental health concerns of students. The following points may provide a bird's eye view of the role of NEP-2020 in promoting the physical/mental health of students and thereby managing their academic anxiety:

1. The NEP-2020 mentions to provide nutritious meals and introduce professionally trained counsellors and social workers in every school to take care of the physical and mental health of children.
2. NEP-2020 mentions to incorporate, "training in health, including preventive health, mental health, good nutrition, personal and public hygiene, disaster response and first-aid" in curriculum.
3. Development of effective and timely safety mechanisms well-known to all students in order to address the arduous issues that affect adolescents such as substance abuse, bullying, violence, and any form of discrimination have also been mentioned in NEP-2020.
4. In order to provide support for students NEP-2020 mentions to make available counsellors for ensuring over-all well-being of students and to provide them with 'professional academic and career counseling'.
5. NEP-2020 also mentions, to have in every education institution, counseling systems for managing stress and emotional adjustments of students.

NEP-2020 is a comprehensive policy that has tried to address the physical and mental health issues faced by students to some extent. However, a lot is yet to be done since in India, there is

no separate policy to tackle mental health issues of children (Patil, 2022a). In addition to the above points, researcher would respectfully put forward a few other suggestions for managing academic anxiety of learners:

1. Efforts must be made to create learner friendly home and school environment.
2. Regular counseling of students as well as of parents must be prioritized.
3. Learners struggling with online learning environment must be provided with proper assistance.
4. Small steps of learners towards progress must be acknowledged.
5. To safeguard the mental health of students a distinct and comprehensive mental health programme/policy needs to be created.

Conclusion: Academic anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health concerns experienced by learners that affect their academic performance and overall well-being. It may be said that reimagining and embracing a novel approach that brings together the efforts of the Government, school authorities, and parents for managing academic anxiety and protecting the mental health of learners is needed. Furthermore, the appointment of well-trained counselors as permanent staff in every school is the need of the hour. This will help students in managing their mental health during their school years and prepare them to effectively deal with the challenges of the future.

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