



Self-esteem and Adjustment among Children with Reading and Writing Difficulties

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ABSTRACT The present study, conducted in Dharwad city (Karnataka), examined the relationship between self-esteem and adjustment among children with reading and writing difficulties. A total sample of 418 children studying in grade six in different schools were selected based on their previous academic performance of the class-tests and teacher's rating. They were further tested on Bai's reading and writing tests in Kannada. About 180 children who were found to be having reading difficulty and 114 children who were found to be having writing difficulty in were selected for further testing on self-esteem and adjustment along with a group of normal children (165 in reading and 240 in writing) for comparison purpose. Analysis revealed that 93% of academically low achieving children (based on the class records and teacher rating) were found to be having reading difficulty while 58% had writing difficulty. Among academically high/normal achieving children, 77% were found to be normal in reading while 13% were found to be having reading difficulty. In writing 87% of the high/normal achieving students were normal and 5% were found to be having difficulty. Children with reading and writing difficulties obtained significantly low score in self-esteem and adjustment when compared to normal children. Children having reading and writing difficulty had poor scores on general and academic aspects of self-esteem and on peers and teachers related areas of adjustment. However, the differences between the groups were found to be low suggesting that suitable remedial/ intervention programmes may bring the children with difficulty on par with normal children.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to read and write is an important skill for a child. However, millions of children experience difficulty in learning. Learning difficulties are isolated problems but can affect other curricular areas as well as personal, social, self esteem and adjustment areas (Rozario 1991). Self-esteem is a feeling, not a skill that is necessary for academic and social success. Self-esteem originates early and its structure becomes increasingly elaborate with age. Building self-esteem in children requires collaboration between parents, school personnel and the child (Pomerantz and Saxon 2001). Research findings reveal that children with higher self-esteem showed higher intrinsic motivation and better academic performance (Redden 2000). Educators, parents, psychologists, sociologists, professionals and others agree that there is a need to develop individuals with a healthy high self-esteem

Low self-esteem is associated with the use of maladaptive achievement strategies, which in turn are associated with maladjustment at school. Achievement strategies that students deploy are reflected not only in their school adjustment, but

also in their overall problem behavior (Aunola et al. 2000). Children with learning problems often experience frustration and develop emotional problems such as low self-esteem as a result of repeated failures (Lyon 2000). As per the report of Brooks (2001), many children with learning problems are burdened with feelings of low self-esteem and they exhibit helplessness in learning, have difficulty in making decisions, exhibit low tolerance for frustration and poor adjustments with peers.

Very few studies are conducted in India on self-esteem and adjustment among children with reading and writing difficulties. Hence, the present study was carried out with the objective of studying the self-esteem and adjustment among children with reading and writing difficulties.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Selection of Schools and Children: Fourteen schools were selected from available 56 schools in Dharwad city. Children studying in 6th standard from selected schools, who were selected based on their previous academic performance in the class tests and the teacher's rating participated in the present study. There were 203 academically

low achieving children and 215 academically high achieving children.

Tools Used For Screening Reading and Writing Abilities: Bai's Kannada reading test was used to screen and identify children with reading difficulties. The reading test consists of 150 Kannada words printed on a sheet of paper. The number of correct words read in one-minute time was noted and each correct read word carried one mark. For sixth standard children, a score of 43 (norm for fourth grade) was taken as cut off point for determining reading difficulty and a score of 65 (norm for sixth grade) was taken as cut off point for determining good readers.

For writing test, a list of 30 words selected from the same reading test, was dictated to the children. One mark was given for each correctly written word. For sixth standard children, a score of 9 (norm for fourth standard) was taken as cut off point for selecting children with writing difficulty. For categorizing normal children a score of 13 (norm for sixth grade) was taken as cut off point. In reading and writing tests, the children who scored between 43-65 (reading) and 9-13 (writing) were considered as children with below average in academic performance.

Tools Used to Assess Self-Esteem and Adjustment: Culture – Free Self Esteem Inventory developed by Battle (1981) (Form – A) and Pre-adolescent Adjustment Scale developed by Preek et al. (1976) were used to assess the self esteem and adjustment among children.

Culture – free self esteem inventory consisted of 60 items, classified into 5 sub-scales: general self-esteem, social/peer related self-esteem, academic/school related self-esteem, parents/home related self-esteem, lie scale, indicating defensiveness. The scores for self esteem are derived by totaling the number of items, excluding the lie scale items of 10. The highest possible score on Form-A is 50.

The adjustment scale consisted of 40 items for different areas, viz., home (9), peers (8), school (8), teachers (8) and general (7). The total of the

5 areas gave the score for total adjustment. High positive scores indicated high adjustment in the area, while high negative scores indicated maladjustment.

Procedure: Prior permission from the school authorities was taken. Series of tests were administered to 6th standard children during their convenient time with in a stipulated period. Children were screened for reading and writing difficulties. Children with difficulty in reading and writing and normal children were further assessed on self-esteem and adjustment inventories. Data collected were subjected to suitable statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Screening and Selection of Experimental Groups and Control Groups

The findings of screening test showed that, in reading abilities, out of 203 academically low achieving children, 93% were found to be having difficulty, while 7% were average performing children. In writing abilities, 58% were having difficulty, 24% were good and 18% were found to be average. Among high achieving children (215), 77% were found to be good and 13% were found to be having difficulty. In writing ability, 87% were found to be good and only 5% were found to have difficulty in writing. It is interesting to observe that majority of the low achieving children (as judged by their marks in class test and teacher rating) had real problems with reading followed by writing (Table 1).

For further analysis, children having difficulty in both reading and writing were pooled together and considered as experimental group (180 in reading and 114 in writing) and good readers and writers as control (165 in reading and 240 in writing) group for comparison purpose. The average children were excluded from further testing. Thus a total of 180 children with reading difficulties and 114 children with writing difficulties (Table 2) were considered for the study as experimental group.

Table 1: Screening results of academically low and high achieving children

Variables	Academically low (N=203)			Academically high (N=215)		
	Difficult	Average	Good	Good	Average	Difficult
Reading	189(93)	14 (7)	-	165(77)	22(10)	28(13)
Writing	118(58)	37(18)	48(24)	192(87)	13 (8)	10 (5)

Cut off scores - for reading - Difficult - <43, Average - 43-65, Good - >65
 - for writing - Difficult - <9, Average - 9-13, Good- >9

Figures in parenthesis indicates percentages

Table 2: Number of children selected for difficult (experimental) and good (control) groups

Variables	Difficult (Experimental)	Good (Control)	Total
Reading	180	165	345
Writing	114	240	354

Self-esteem among Children with Reading Difficulty and Good Reading/Writing

Self-esteem was found to be significantly poor in children with reading difficulty as compared to children with good reading. Results in relation to components of self-esteem showed that children with reading difficulty scored significantly lower than the children with good reading on general and academic components (Table 3). Similar results were observed on writing ability and self-esteem too. Children with writing difficulty were found to have significantly lower self-esteem compared to good readers. In general and academic components of self-esteem, they scored significantly poor scores than the control group (Table 4).

These results are in line with the study conducted by Hay et al. (1998), Raj and Agarwal (2005) who stated that, children who scored high in academic subjects were also found to have high self esteem scores and vice versa. A study conducted by Kershner (1994) revealed that high self-esteem leads to successful achievement in

reading and writing. Saracoglu et al. (2002) as well as Gillis and Connell (2003) found that children with high self-esteem had positive school performance than children with lower self-esteem and stated that self-esteem correlated positively with general achievement.

Adjustment among Children with Reading/Writing Difficulty and Good Reading/Writing

The results of adjustment score among children with reading and writing difficulty and children with good reading/writing are depicted in Tables 5 and 6. Children with reading difficulty were found to have lower adjustment scores than good readers. In the components of adjustment, they scored significantly lower scores on peers and teacher related areas. Similar results were found for writing difficulty and adjustment.

These results are in agreement with the results of Tiwari et al. (1995) which concluded that high and low achieving adolescents significantly differed in home, social and emotional areas of adjustment. Results of the study conducted by Gross and Siperstein (1997), Mythili et al. (2004) showed that, students with reading and writing problems experienced poorer adjustment than those without problems. A study by Saracoglu et al. (2002) also showed that students with learning difficulties reported significantly poor academic adjustment.

Table 3: Self-esteem among difficult and normal children-reading

Self-esteem components (Max. score)	Children with reading difficulty N=180		Children with good reading N=165		Percentage difference	't'
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
General (20)	13.6	2.3	14.4	2.5	4	2.9 **
Social (10)	5.9	1.6	5.7	1.4	2	1.3 ns
Academic (10)	7.2	1.5	7.8	1.1	6	3.6 **
Parents (10)	7.1	1.7	7.2	1.1	1	0.3 ns
Total self esteem (50)	33.4	3.9	35.1	4.3	3	3.5 **

** Significant at 0.5 per cent level ns Non significant

Table 4: Self-esteem among difficult and normal children-writing

Self-esteem components (Max. score)	Children with writing difficulty N=114		Children with good writing N=240		Percentage difference	't'
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
General (20)	13.3	2.3	14.6	2.5	7	4.4 **
Social (10)	5.6	1.3	5.8	1.6	1	0.7 ns
Academic (10)	7.1	1.5	7.7	1.1	6	3.8 **
Parents (10)	7.1	1.7	7.1	1.6	0	0.1 ns
Total self esteem (50)	33.2	3.9	35.1	4.4	6	3.9 **

** Significant at 0.5 per cent level ns Non significant

Table 5: Adjustment among difficult and normal children-reading

Adjustment components (Max. score)	Children with reading difficulty N=180		Children with good reading N=165		Percentage difference	't'
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Home (9)	7.1	1.6	7.4	1.4	3	1.5 ns
Peers (8)	5.8	1.3	6.2	1.3	5	2.6 *
School (8)	5.7	1.3	6.0	1.3	4	0.5 ns
Teacher (8)	5.7	1.6	6.3	1.3	8	3.1 **
General (7)	5.1	1.2	5.3	1.2	3	0.6 ns
Total Adjustment (40)	29.6	4.9	30.9	4.4	3	2.5 *

* Significant at 0.1 per cent level ** Significant at 0.5 per cent level ns Non significant

Table 6: Adjustment among difficult and normal children-writing

Adjustment components (Max. score)	Children with writing difficulty N=114		Children with good writing N=240		Percentage difference	't'
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Home (9)	7.1	1.6	7.5	1.4	5	2.2 ns
Peers (8)	5.6	1.3	6.2	1.3	8	3.4 **
School (8)	5.7	1.4	5.9	1.3	3	1.2 ns
Teacher (8)	5.5	1.5	6.3	1.3	11	4.5 **
General (7)	5.1	1.1	5.3	1.2	3	0.7 ns
Total Adjustment(40)	29.2	4.9	31.2	4.4	5	3.7 **

** Significant at 0.5 per cent level ns Non significant

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded from the study that children with reading and writing difficulties had low level of self-esteem and adjustment compared to children with good reading and writing. Though significant differences were observed between the experimental and control groups, the differences were not huge in terms of percentage of scores. This suggests that appropriate intervention/remedial programmes may help those children with learning difficulties to overcome their problems. Essential support from parents and teachers may play crucial role in this regard.

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