

## Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among High School Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to explore the relationship between Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among High School Students. The effect of Levels of Schooling and Gender on Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement were also examined among high school students. A sample of 200 students was selected from 2 private schools in Chennai through simple random sampling technique. They completed Curiosity and Exploration Inventory II (Kashdan, Gallagher, Silvia, Winterstein, Breen, Terharand & Steger, 2009), Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) and Demographic Sheet. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Independent samples t-test was used to analyse the data. The result revealed that there was no significant correlation between academic achievement and curiosity. However curiosity and academic achievement on happiness was significantly correlated. There was no significant gender difference in academic achievement, curiosity and happiness. There was significant difference between levels of schooling on curiosity and academic achievement.

**Keywords:** *Curiosity, Happiness, Academic Achievement, High school students, Levels of schooling, Gender*

School board exam in India determines the choice of student's higher education. In such a grade oriented system, students suffer from academic workload in order to obtain good grade than acquiring knowledge. Some of the main sources of stress for high school students are long study hours, tests, pressure to do well in exams and deciding about career (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2004). Indian students spend lot of time on homework and less time on recreation which results in internalizing and adjustment problems (Verma, Sharma, & Larson, 2002).

Indian education encourages rote learning which neglects the development of creativity and critical thinking of the students. Students face difficulty in understanding the concepts due to surface learning. Curiosity will help students to think more than the material being presented in order to understand better which helps in deep processing of information and enhanced learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976). Curiosity has significant effect on motivation and learning (Kashdan & Fincham, 2004).

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Also Students face high exam stress which may lead to more social concerns, psychiatric and mental disorders (Schaefer, Matthes, Pfitzer, & Kohle, 2007). Due to academic stress, students experience burnout and uneasy feelings. Happiness and optimism of students would lead to reduce exam stress (Gheitarani, Asadi, Akbarnejhad, & Ghayoomi, 2017). Positive education for students is very important which helps to empower student's character strength and well-being.

### *Need for the study*

Students experience academic stress due to over competitiveness, over expectations from teachers and parents, periodic examinations and relationship problems. This results in development of psychiatric problems and examination related anxiety (Deb, Strodl, & Sun, 2014; Deb et al., 2015). Despite the positive impact of non-cognitive factors, it still remains relatively unexplored area in Indian educational system. So the aim of the present study is to establish the relationship between Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement in order to equip students to handle the pressure they face in the realm of education in India. Promoting curiosity in children is important because it fosters search for meaning, life satisfaction and growth oriented behaviour (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). It also helps to address the achievement gap, regardless of their background (Shah, Weeks, Richards, & Kaciroti, 2018). Happiness increases overall life satisfaction (Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009).

*Thus the study becomes important for the following reasons.*

1. To examine the relationship between Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement.
2. School is a crucial context for students' well-being. So there is a need to introduce the relevant intervention programs in schools and to create awareness among teachers, parents and policy makers to acknowledge the importance of non-cognitive factors.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### *Curiosity and Academic Achievement*

Kashdan and Yuen (2007) conducted the study on 484 Hong Kong high school students. They completed the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Curiosity and Exploration Inventory (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004) and Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) scores were used to measure academic success. The result revealed that curious students were academically successful in challenging school environment. Students who perceived their school as less challenging had less academic success though they are highly curious.

Kumar and Phogat (2016) selected 150 secondary level students from two schools through stratified sampling technique. They completed Children Curiosity Scale (Kumar, 1992) and reported their annual examination marks. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis and t test were used. Result showed significant positive correlation between Curiosity and Academic Achievement. Curiosity and Academic Achievement wasn't gender sensitive.

### *Happiness and Academic Achievement*

Kewalramani and Ahirwar (2018) conducted study on school students and they completed the Self – Efficacy scale (Sherer, Mark, Maddux, Mercandante, Dunn, Jacobs, & Rogers, 1982), Perceived Social Support Scale (Procidano, Mary &, Heller, 1983) and Oxford Happiness Scale (Argyle, 1989). Pearson Correlation and t test was used for the analysis. Result

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revealed that Perceived Social support; Happiness and Self- Efficacy are not significantly correlated with Academic Performance. However support of parent does affect the academic performance.

Khoshnam and Gendavani (2013) selected 341 students through cluster sampling technique. Oxford Happiness Scale (Argyle, 1989) and Internal Motivation questionnaires (McAuley, Duncan &, Wraith, 1991) were administered. Academic grade average was used to measure the academic achievement. Pearson correlation coefficient, stepwise regression analyses and Z test was used to analyze the data. The result showed positive significant relationship between Internal Motivation, Happiness and Academic Achievement. There were no significant difference between males and females on these variables. Regression Analysis result showed that only internal motivation was able to predict Academic Achievement.

### ***Curiosity and Happiness***

Kaczmarek, Baczkowski, Enko, Baran, and Theuns (2014) studied subjective well-being as a mediator for depression and curiosity. Snow ball technique was used in this study. Through web based survey, two hundred and fifty seven adults completed the Curiosity and Exploration Inventory – II (Kashdan et al., 2009), The Steen Happiness Index (Seligman, Parks, Steen, & Peterson, 2005) and Nine items taken from the Depression scale from the Center for Epidemiological Studies (Radloff, 1977; Ziarko, Kaczmarek, & Haładziński, 2013). The result indicates that the curious individuals tend to have lower levels of depression and higher levels of subjective well-being.

### ***Academic Achievement and Gender***

Yadav, Teena and Chahal (2016) studied the impact of region, gender and caste on Academic Achievement. Through Stratified random sampling, 284 students were selected and completed self-made questionnaire made by researchers. Result revealed that there was no significant gender difference in academic achievement. Caste doesn't have an impact on academic achievement whereas region has an effect to some extent. Rural students are higher in academic achievement compared to urban students.

### ***Objectives***

1. To study the relationship between Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among high school students.
2. To examine the effect of Levels of Schooling on Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among high school students.
3. To examine the effect of Gender on Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among high school students.

### ***Rationale for hypotheses***

From Review of Literature, it is evident that the studies show mixed results. Some studies show that Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement were positively correlated but some showed no significant correlation (Kashdan & Yuen, 2007; Kumar & Phogat, 2016; Kewalramani & Ahirwar, 2018, & Khoshnam & Gendavani, 2013). The effect of Levels of schooling on these variables was not explored. So due to mix findings on these variables, null hypothesis was formulated.

### ***Hypotheses***

1. There will be no significant relationship between curiosity and academic achievement among high school students.

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2. There will be no significant relationship between happiness and academic achievement among high school students.
3. There will be no significant relationship between curiosity and happiness among high school students.
4. There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on academic achievement.
5. There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on curiosity.
6. There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on happiness.
7. There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on academic achievement.
8. There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on curiosity.
9. There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on happiness.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

- Ex post facto research.

### *Sample*

Through simple random sampling technique, 200 students from two private schools in Chennai in the age range of 14 to 18 years were selected. Out of 200, 100 were secondary school students and 100 were higher secondary school students. Each group consist of 50 male and 50 female students.

### *Instruments*

1. Academic Achievement was measured using mean of core subject marks.
2. Demographic scale was prepared by researcher.
3. Curiosity and Exploration Inventory II has 10 items and two subscales namely stretching and embracing. Aggregated score can be taken due to high correlation between the subscales (Kashdan et al., 2009). Higher score indicates higher curiosity. Cronbach's alpha values ranges from 0.83 to 0.86. It has good internal reliability.
4. Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) which has 4 items rated on a 7 point Likert scale that measures global happiness with one's life. The 4th item is reverse coded. Mean score is calculated. Higher score indicates greater happiness. Internal consistency was found to be 0.86. It has good content, discriminative and construct validity.

### *Statistical analysis*

1. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (r)
2. Independent-Samples t-test

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION****Table 1: Correlation of coefficient of Curiosity, Happiness and Academic Achievement among High School Students (N=200)**

Variables	Academic Achievement	Curiosity	Happiness
Academic Achievement	1	0.081 <sup>NS</sup>	0.166*
Curiosity		1	0.143*
Happiness			1

\* $p < 0.05$  \*NS – Not significant

To examine whether there is any relationship between the three variables, Pearson Product-moment correlations was computed. From the above table it is observed that there is no significant correlation between Curiosity and Academic Achievement ( $r=0.081$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Thus the present study accepts the hypothesis 1 stating that “There will be no significant relationship between Curiosity and Academic Achievement among high school students”. Curiosity is not related to Academic Achievement may be because of person environment mismatch. Curious students were academically successful only when they viewed their school environment as challenging (Kashdan & Yuen, 2007). So school environment also plays an important role. Parenting styles and child – rearing environment also contribute to children’s curiosity (Crockett, 1995). Few studies showed significant correlation between Academic Achievement and Curiosity (Kumar & Phogat, 2016; Tariq, Batool, & Khan, 2013) which contradicts the present study because contextual factors like school and home environment also play a role to determine whether the curious students thrive academically. Kashdan & Yuen (2007) found that individuals become curious when a situation satisfies the need for challenge and novelty. Especially in India, some academic subjects are highly valued with regard to prestige rather than their relative fit with student’s personal interest (Gupta & Tracey, 2005). So the curiosity level is curbed due to mismatch with their interest. Without considering the comprehension level of students, teachers cover vast syllabus (Raina, 1983). Students lose their interest in studies because they develop fear of academic failure which is reinforced both by parents and teachers (Shah, 1991).

Above table shows Happiness and Academic Achievement is significantly correlated ( $r=0.166$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). So the hypothesis 2 stating that “There will be no significant relationship between Happiness and Academic Achievement among high school students” is not accepted. This finding is in accordance with the literature which showed that Happiness and Academic Achievement are positively correlated (Khoshnam & Gendavani, 2013; Pordanjani, Yahyanezhad, & Moharer, 2014). But in contrary, some studies have shown that there are no significant relationship between Happiness and Academic Achievement (Kewalramani & Ahirwar, 2018; Mushtaq, Ghayas, & Niazi, 2014, Tabbodi, Rahgozar & MakkiAbadi, 2015). The studies which have shown positive correlation were mostly done on College students whereas the current study was done on high school students. So it may be one of the reason to get weak significant correlation because especially between the age of 15 and 18, adolescents often face internalizing problems and peer pressure which decreases their happiness level (Verhulst, van der Ende, Ferdinand, & Kasius, 1997; Sangeetha & Chetan, 2015). Also students undergo transition from middle to high school and face adjustment problems (Juneja, 2018). During transition period, Academic achievement appears to decline (Alspaugh, 1998).

Table 1 shows significant correlation between Curiosity and Happiness ( $r=0.143$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This result is corroborated by the previous finding by Kaczmarek et al. (2014). It can be speculated that the present study showed weak correlation may be because of different tool

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used in the study. Thus the hypothesis 3 stating that “There will be no significant relationship between Curiosity and Happiness among high school students” is not accepted.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means of male and female high school students on Academic Achievement (N = 200)**

Gender							t
Male			Female				
M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
53.33	15.58	100	57.28	17.74	100	1.672 <sup>NS</sup>	

NS – Not Significant

There is no significant difference between Males (M=53.33, SD=15.58) and Females (M=57.28, SD=17.74), with  $t = 1.672$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . This result is consistent with the literature (Yadav et al., 2016; Verma, 2016). Hence, it may be inferred that female and male students exhibit more or less similar level of academic achievement. Therefore, the study accepts the null hypothesis 4 stating “There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on Academic Achievement”.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means of male and female high school students on Curiosity (N = 200)**

Gender							t
Male			Female				
M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
34.7	6.76	100	34.64	6.24	100	0.065 <sup>NS</sup>	

NS – Not Significant

There is no significant difference between Males (M= 34.7, SD=6.76) and Females (M=34.64, SD=6.24), with  $t = 0.065$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . The findings of the present study have also been endorsed by few researchers who observed no gender difference on curiosity (Kumar & Phogat, 2016; Tariq et al., 2013). Therefore, the study accepts the null hypothesis 5 stating “There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on Curiosity”.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means of male and female high school students on Happiness (N = 200)**

Gender							t
Male			Female				
M	SD	N	M	SD	N		
4.66	1.1	100	4.48	1.18	100	1.097 <sup>NS</sup>	

NS – Not Significant

There is no significant difference between Males (M=4.66, SD=1.1) and Females (M=4.48, SD=1.18), with  $t = 1.097$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Present study finding is consonant with the literature

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(Khoshnam & Gendavani, 2013; Hassanzadeh & Mahdinejad, 2013). This indicates that gender doesn't have an effect on Happiness. Therefore, the study accepts the null hypothesis 6 stating "There will be no significant difference between male and female high school students on Happiness".

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means obtained by Secondary and Higher secondary students on Academic Achievement (N = 200)**

Secondary Students			Higher Secondary Students			t
M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
59.98	15.93	100	50.63	16.36	100	4.094*

$P < 0.01^*$

There is significant difference between Secondary students (M=59.98, SD=15.93) and Higher secondary students (M=50.63, SD=16.36), with  $t = 4.094$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Secondary students got higher academic achievement compared to high school students. High school students face lot of stress to do well in exams (Kouzma & Kennedy, 2014). They also face career anxiety in terms of their choice of profession (NALBANTOGLU YILMAZYILMAZ & Cetin Gunduz, 2018). Academic anxiety and stress reduce the academic success (Das, Halder, Mishra, 2014). Therefore high school students' academic achievement is lower compared to secondary school students. Therefore, the null hypothesis 7 stating "There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on Academic Achievement" is not accepted.

**Table 7: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means obtained by Secondary and Higher secondary students on Curiosity (N = 200)**

Secondary Students			Higher Secondary Students			T
M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
33.05	6.61	100	36.29	5.97	100	3.63*

$P < 0.01^*$

There is significant difference between Secondary Students (M=33.05, SD=6.61) and Higher Secondary Students (M=36.05, SD=5.97), with  $t = 3.63$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Higher secondary students are more curious compared to secondary school students. It is accordance with Mandl (2007) who found that eleventh grade students reported higher level of curiosity compared to ninth grade students. Therefore, the null hypothesis 8 stating "There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on Curiosity" is not accepted.

**Table 8: Descriptive statistics and significance of difference between the means obtained by Secondary and Higher secondary students on Happiness (N = 200)**

Secondary Students		Levels of Schooling			t
M	SD	N	M	SD	
4.6	1.2	100	4.54	1.09	0.746 <sup>NS</sup>

NS – Not Significant

There is no significant difference between Secondary Students (M=4.6, SD=1.2) and Higher secondary students (M=4.54, SD=1.09), with  $t = .746, p > 0.05$ . It may be because both higher secondary school students and secondary school students are in the adolescent phase and undergo a transition period where they face internalizing problems (Verhulst et al., 1997). Some of the common problems faced by them are pressure from romantic partner and friends, disagreement with parents, pubertal changes, anxieties about future, adult responsibility (Santrock 2008; Coleman 2011; Davey, Eaker & Walters 2003; Byrne, Davenport & Mazanov 2007; Seiffge-Krenke, Aunola & Nurmi, 2009; Coleman & Hagell, 2007). Both the groups might face similar problems and that might be the reason for no significant difference in happiness among high school students. Therefore, the study accepts the null hypothesis 9 stating “There will be no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on Happiness”.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. There is no significant relationship between curiosity and academic achievement among high school students.
2. There is a significant positive relationship between happiness and academic achievement among high school students.
3. There is a significant positive relationship between happiness and curiosity among high school students.
4. There is no significant difference between male and female high school students on academic achievement.
5. There is no significant difference between male and female high school students on curiosity.
6. There is no significant difference between male and female high school students on happiness.
7. There is a significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on academic achievement.
8. There is a significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on curiosity.
9. There is no significant difference between higher secondary students and secondary students on happiness.

## IMPLICATIONS

Many studies have stated the importance of Happiness and Curiosity. Children spend most of their time in school and they also learn important values there. Government, NGOs and Policy Makers have to consider including courses that focus on non-cognitive skills in the

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school curriculum that can enhance their mental health well-being. School counsellors can conduct intervention programs and workshops for students in order to foster Non-Cognitive skills.

### LIMITATIONS

1. The present study considered only High school students and data were collected from private schools in Chennai. Thus it cannot be generalized to the whole student population.
2. Dimensions of Curiosity were not included.

### Suggestions for future research

1. Future research should consider the dimensions of Curiosity in order to understand its effect clearly.
2. Other factors like parenting style, school environment and academic motivation can also be assessed along with these variables.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not a conflict of interests

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