

## **Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts between CBSE and ICSE Students: Comparative Analysis**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the levels of experiential avoidance and automatic negative thoughts among students enrolled in two distinct educational systems in India: the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE). Experiential avoidance refers to the tendency to avoid or suppress uncomfortable emotions or thoughts, while automatic negative thoughts represent the spontaneous occurrence of negative cognitive patterns. The sample consists of [number] students from both CBSE and ICSE schools, selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using standardized measures for experiential avoidance and automatic negative thoughts. Results indicate no significant differences in both experiential avoidance and automatic negative thoughts between CBSE and ICSE students. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of educational practices and mental health interventions tailored to the unique needs of students in different educational systems. Understanding these psychological processes can contribute to the development of targeted interventions to promote students' emotional well-being and academic success.

**Keywords:** *Experiential Avoidance, Automatic Negative Thoughts, Educational Systems, CBSE, ICSE*

**I**n the field of education, the study of inherent mental processes and their resultant impact holds particular significance. In this context, two crucial mental processes are Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts, which can contribute significantly to the development and guidance of students in education. Understanding the similarities and distinctions of students from various educational boards such as CBSE and ICSE is essential. CBSE operates as a national-level educational board with a standardized curriculum, while ICSE encourages a more comprehensive and elaborate curriculum. Hence, investigating the potential differences in the mental processes of students from these two educational systems becomes a pertinent subject for this study.

Experiential Avoidance arises from individuals' inclination to evade or suppress inner experiences—such as memories, emotions, thoughts, or physical sensations—due to their discomfort or unpleasantness. It encompasses a variety of behaviors and strategies used to

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prevent or escape from distressing or threatening mental situations. Experiential avoidance can manifest in different forms, such as substance abuse, distraction techniques, avoidance behaviors, or other maladaptive coping strategies. While these methods may temporarily alleviate suffering, they often lead to exacerbating underlying issues over time. Hayes et al. (1999) developed a therapeutic approach in which experiential avoidance is a central construct in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). According to ACT, a key factor underlying various types of psychopathology, including anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse, and chronic pain, is experiential avoidance. ACT posits that efforts to ignore or avoid unpleasant internal sensations often result in psychological inflexibility and a decreased ability to pursue important life goals. Research by Kashdan et al. (2006) and Chapman et al. (2006) suggested that experiential avoidance is linked to a range of adverse outcomes, including increased psychological distress, impaired emotional regulation, interpersonal difficulties, and reduced quality of life. Moreover, experiential avoidance has been implicated in the maintenance and exacerbation of various mental health disorders, highlighting its significance in understanding and addressing mental challenges. In the context of education, it has been examined that experiential avoidance can have significant implications for students' academic performance, well-being, and overall development (Martínez-Rubio et al., 2023).

According to the cognitive model of therapy, automatic negative thoughts, which include negative thoughts about oneself, perceived threats from others, and the future, are self-statements driven by negative core beliefs. These thoughts are often described as "overwhelmingly automatic... involuntary and difficult to hinder." They are reflexive and frequently evade conscious oversight or control. Automatic negative thoughts may arise as a result of how an individual processes information following a stressful event. Dr. Aaron Beck's work on the cognitive theory of depression in the 1960s first emphasized the pivotal role of negative thoughts in depression. Beck suggested that "negative automatic thoughts, generated by distorted beliefs, were the cause of depressive symptoms, and not vice versa." According to Beck, maladaptive self-construction, or distorted mental, emotional, physical, and attitudinal patterns developed in early life, affect an individual at core levels, and distorted patterns can be triggered due to adverse life events, leading to negative thoughts. Martínez-Rubio et al. (2023) illustrated that automatic negative thoughts have a significant impact on depressive symptoms, underscoring the importance of addressing cognitive patterns in therapeutic interventions. Depressive symptoms are associated with negative thinking patterns. Individuals with major depressive disorder (MDD) often report self-deprecating thoughts and feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. These thoughts often appear unwarranted and spontaneous. Pedro et al. (2019) stated that anxiety, or excessive fear, stress, or concern about specific situations, is strongly associated with negative automatic thoughts. Automatic negative thoughts tend to focus on worst-case scenarios, self-criticism, and perceived threats. This repetitive negative thinking can elevate anxiety levels. In a study of high school students in Turkey, researchers found that students who had automatic negative thoughts about the outcome of a task felt decreased motivation to study. Automatic negative thoughts can significantly impact motivation levels. When individuals consistently engage in negative self-talk or harbor critical beliefs, it can create a cycle of self-doubt, procrastination, and diminished motivation. Beck, Rush, Shaw, and Emery (1979) have shown that automatic negative thoughts are central to the cognitive model of depression. They proposed that negative thoughts contribute to the development and maintenance of depressive symptoms, including decreased motivation. The cognitive distortions inherent in these thoughts, such as overgeneralization, catastrophizing, and

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personalization, can exacerbate feelings of sadness and inertia. Studies have found that automatic negative thoughts can lead to diminished academic success. Research conducted by Martin Seligman, a pioneer in the field of positive psychology, highlights the role of negative thinking in predicting success and achievement. Seligman's work emphasizes the concept of learned helplessness, where individuals develop a sense of vulnerability and passivity in response to negative experiences. This mindset can lead to a lack of initiative and perseverance, ultimately hindering success. For example, individuals prone to automatic negative thoughts may interpret setbacks or failures as evidence of their incompetence or unworthiness. This defeatist attitude can discourage them from pursuing future opportunities or taking risks, limiting their chances of success. Additionally, negative thinking patterns can undermine confidence and self-efficacy, essential factors for achieving goals and overcoming obstacles.

Moreover, automatic negative thoughts can distort perception and impede problem-solving abilities, making it difficult to effectively navigate challenges and make sound decisions. For instance, individuals plagued by pessimistic thoughts may focus excessively on potential obstacles or worst-case scenarios, overlooking opportunities and solutions. Automatic Negative Thoughts can significantly decrease hope, which is a vital psychological resource for navigating challenges and pursuing goals. Snyder, C. R. (2000) underscored the importance of hope in fostering resilience and well-being. When individuals engage in negative self-talk or harbor pessimistic beliefs, it can erode hope by fostering feelings of helplessness and despair. This negative mindset diminishes belief in one's ability to achieve positive outcomes, leading to a loss of motivation and a sense of resignation. Negative thinking patterns can lead to difficulties with managing emotions and poor emotional control. Meihua Yu et al. (2022) studied the assessment of life stress and emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents. Researchers found that "negative thinking patterns – not disturbed mood states, emotion regulation difficulties, or negative cognitive distortions – explain the association between change in life stress and emotional and behavioral problems in adolescence."

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) are distinct educational systems in India, each with unique characteristics and principles that shape the learning experiences of millions of students across the country. Understanding the differences between these two educational boards in terms of curriculum, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices is essential for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders involved in promoting quality education and student development. CBSE, established in 1962 under the Union Government of India, operates as a national-level board of education. It follows a centralized curriculum characterized by its structured approach and standardized assessments. CBSE places emphasis on core

### **METHOD**

#### ***Problem:***

To compare Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts between student of CBSE and ICSE.

#### **Objectives:**

- To compare Experiential Avoidance between students of CBSE and ICSE.
- To compare Automatic Negative Thoughts between students of CBSE and ICSE.

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### ***Hypothesis:***

- There will be significant difference of Experiential Avoidance between students of CBSE and ICSE.
- There will be significant difference of Automatic Negative Thoughts between students of CBSE and ICSE.

### ***Variables:***

#### ***Independent Variable:***

##### **Education Board**

- CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education)
- ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education)

#### ***Dependent Variable:***

- Experiential Avoidance
- Automatic Negative Thoughts

### ***Tools:***

- **Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire:** The Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ) developed by Watson et al., (2011) was used.
- **Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire:** The Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire developed by Hollon & Kendall, (1980) was used to measure the frequency of negative automatic thoughts.

### ***Sample***

100 students (50 CBSE + 50 ICSE Board) were purposively selected from various CBSE and ICSE board schools from Delhi and NCR.

### ***Inclusion Criteria:***

- Students who passed the class 10<sup>th</sup> exam with at least 50%.
- Students who are currently studying in same board of education.

### ***Exclusion Criteria:***

- Students who scored below 55% in their 10<sup>th</sup> board examination.
- Students who have transferred from other educational systems or have a mixed educational background.
- Students with known cognitive or psychological impairments that may affect their ability to respond accurately to questionnaire items.
- Participants who refuse to participate in the study or withdraw consent during the data collection process.
- Students who are enrolled in special education programs or alternative learning environments, as their experiences may differ significantly from mainstream CBSE and ICSE students.

**Research Design:** Double Group Design was used.

**Statistics:** Descriptive analysis and T-Test was used to compute Results of Data using SPSS V 23.

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**RESULTS**

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics*

	Board	N	Mean	SD
Experiential Avoidance	CBSE	42	65.45	21.18
	ICSE	50	67.64	14.19
Automatic Negative Thoughts	CBSE	42	133.52	42.07
	ICSE	50	140.70	25.79

The Descriptive statistics table and T- table present group statistics and the results of independent samples t-tests comparing two educational boards (CBSE and ICSE) in terms of Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT).

For Experiential Avoidance, the mean score for CBSE students was 65.45 with a standard deviation of 21.188, while for ICSE students, the mean was 67.64 with standard deviation of 14.195. Similarly, for Automatic Negative Thoughts, CBSE students had a mean score of 133.52 with a standard deviation of 42.073, whereas ICSE students had a mean of 140.70 with standard deviation of 25.796.

*Table 2: T Values of Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts for CBSE and ICSE Board*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig.	
	F	Sig.				
Experiential Avoidance	Equal variances assumed	10.809	.001	-.590	90	.55
	Equal variances not assumed			-.570	69.48	.57
Automatic Negative Thoughts	Equal variances assumed	16.771	.000	-1.003	90	.31
	Equal Variances not assumed			-.964	65.516	.339

For Experiential Avoidance, despite a slightly higher mean score for ICSE students, the difference was not statistically significant, as indicated by the t-tests. Whether assuming equal or unequal variances, the p-values were both greater than .05, suggesting no significant difference in Experiential Avoidance between the two boards.

For Automatic Negative Thoughts, the difference in means was not statistically significant, as the t-tests yielded p-values greater than .05 under both assumptions of equal and unequal variances.

There are slight variations in mean scores between CBSE and ICSE students for both Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts, these differences were not deemed statistically significant. Therefore, based on these analyses, there is no evidence to suggest that students from either educational board exhibit significantly different levels of Experiential Avoidance or Automatic Negative Thoughts. These findings may imply that factors other than the educational board, such as individual differences or external influences, may play a more significant role in shaping these psychological constructs among students.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to compare the levels of Experiential Avoidance (EA) and Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) between students enrolled in the Central Board of Secondary

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Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) educational systems. Contrary to expectations, the results indicated no statistically significant differences in either EA or ANTs between CBSE and ICSE students.

Experiential Avoidance, as measured by standardized assessments, showed similar mean scores for both CBSE and ICSE students. These findings suggest that students from both educational boards exhibit comparable levels of avoidance tendencies towards uncomfortable or distressing internal experiences. Despite minor differences in mean scores, the statistical analyses yielded non-significant results, indicating that educational background may not significantly influence levels of EA among adolescents. These results align with previous research emphasizing the universality of experiential avoidance across diverse populations (Hayes et al., 1996; Kashdan et al., 2014).

Similarly, the mean scores for Automatic Negative Thoughts did not significantly differ between CBSE and ICSE students. Despite slightly higher mean scores for ICSE students, the statistical tests yielded non-significant results. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the pervasive nature of automatic negative thinking patterns across various populations (Beck, 1960s). Although ANTs are associated with increased depressive symptoms, anxiety, and reduced motivation, the current study suggests that educational board affiliation may not significantly impact the prevalence of ANTs among students.

### ***Implications and Future Directions:***

The findings of this study have several implications for educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers. Firstly, the absence of significant differences in EA and ANTs between CBSE and ICSE students underscores the importance of addressing these psychological constructs across educational settings. Interventions aimed at promoting psychological well-being and resilience should be tailored to the specific needs of students, regardless of their educational background.

Future research could explore additional factors that may influence levels of EA and ANTs among adolescents, such as school climate, parental involvement, and socio-economic status. Understanding the complex interplay of these factors could inform the development of more targeted interventions to support students' mental health and academic success. Longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term effects of EA and ANTs on students' academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. By tracking students' psychological trajectories over time, researchers can better understand the dynamic nature of these constructs and identify critical periods for intervention and support.

While this study found no significant differences in EA and ANTs between CBSE and ICSE students, further research is needed to explore the nuanced factors influencing students' psychological experiences within different educational contexts. Addressing these psychological constructs remains crucial for promoting students' holistic development and well-being.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provides an insight about Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thoughts between CBSE and ICSE students, it underscores the importance of addressing these psychological constructs in educational contexts. The mean scores for both EA and

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ANTs were found to be comparable between CBSE and ICSE students, with t-tests yielding p-values greater than .05 under assumptions of equal and unequal variances. This suggests that despite minor variations in mean scores, the differences observed were not deemed statistically significant. The sample comprising one hundred (N=100) subjects who were classified into 2 groups i.e. CBSE and ICSE. The study's findings contradict the hypothesis and indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in Experiential Avoidance and Automatic Negative Thought between CBSE and ICSE students. Therefore, the hypothesis is false.

These results cast doubt on the theory that the prevalence of EA and ANTs in teenagers is considerably affected by the instructive board that's chosen. Or maybe, they opine that other factors, such individual refinements or exterior boosts, seem have a more prominent impact on how children frame these mental conceptions. The reality that these discoveries concur with past inquire about on the all inclusiveness of encounter evasion and routine negative thought designs underscores how pivotal it is to address these concepts in all instructive settings. These discoveries have results for teachers, mental wellbeing experts, and policymakers. Particularly, they highlight the require of tweaked intercessions to advance students' mental well-being independent of their instructive level. Future thinks about ought to go more profoundly into the complicated intelligent between numerous components that influence teenagers' EA and ANTs. This information may offer assistance construct more centered treatments and longitudinal studies about that screen students' mental advancement over time. By superior comprehending the energetic nature of these develops, analysts can pinpoint pivotal times for help and intercession in instructive settings.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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