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Learning difficulties and academic struggles among higher secondary students

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Abstract

This study investigates the learning difficulties and academic struggles faced by higher secondary students in Tenkasi district, focusing on the impact of gender, academic group, and locality on their educational performance. A sample of 300 students was selected through stratified random sampling, and a standardized questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings reveal that a significant portion of students experience moderate learning difficulties, with male students and those from rural areas facing higher challenges. Gender and locality-based disparities were evident in both learning difficulties and academic struggles, with male and rural students showing more difficulties. Additionally, differences among academic groups were observed, suggesting the need for differentiated teaching approaches. The study underscores the importance of early intervention, gender-sensitive teaching, and resource allocation, especially for rural students, to improve educational outcomes and foster equitable opportunities for all students.



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INTRODUCTION

Academic success in higher secondary education is crucial for students' future opportunities. However, many students face learning difficulties that affect their academic performance and overall development. Learning difficulties may include challenges in reading, writing, comprehension, or problem-solving, which can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and poor academic outcomes. Understanding these struggles is essential to provide appropriate support and interventions to help students overcome barriers and achieve their potential.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite ongoing educational reforms, many higher secondary students still face learning difficulties that negatively impact their academic performance and overall development. These challenges can lead to decreased motivation, poor self-confidence, and increased dropout rates. Identifying the specific types and severity of learning difficulties is essential for developing effective intervention strategies.

This study is important because it sheds light on the academic struggles students face and the underlying causes of these issues. It helps educators and parents understand the varied learning needs of students, allowing for more personalized teaching approaches. Policymakers can use these insights to allocate resources better and improve support systems in schools. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of counseling and remedial programs tailored to individual student needs.

Addressing these challenges early can prevent long-term academic failure and social-emotional problems. Ultimately, this research aims to promote inclusive education and help students reach their full potential.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aims to investigate the types and severity of learning difficulties and academic struggles among higher secondary students and how these challenges impact their educational performance and behavior.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To find out the level of learning difficulties among higher secondary students.

To assess the level of academic struggles faced by higher secondary students.

To examine the differences in learning difficulties based on gender, group (first, second, third), and locality (rural/urban).

To analyze the differences in academic struggles based on gender, group, and locality.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

There is no significant difference between male and female higher secondary students in their learning difficulties.

There is no significant difference among first, second and third group higher secondary students with respect to learning difficulties.

There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary students in their learning difficulties.

There is no significant difference between male and female higher secondary students in their academic struggles. There is no significant difference among first, second, and third group higher secondary students with respect to academic struggles.

There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary students in their academic struggles.

TOOL USED FOR THE STUDY

A standardized questionnaire was used to measure Learning Difficulties and Academic Struggles among higher secondary students.

Population and Sample

Population:

All higher secondary students studying in schools within the Tenkasi district.

Sample:

A total of 300 higher secondary students were selected through stratified random sampling, consisting of 174 male and 126 female students. The sample included students from rural and urban localities and from first, second, and third academic groups to ensure representativeness.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 LEVEL OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

Low		Moderate		High	
Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
111	37.0	148	49.3	41	13.7

It is inferred from the above table that, 37.0% of students have low, 49.0% of them have moderate and 25.7% of them have high level of Learning Difficulties of students.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between male and female higher secondary school students in their Learning Difficulties.

It is inferred from the above table that calculated 't' value (2.521) is greater than the table value (1.96) for df 298 and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is significant difference between male and female higher secondary school students in their Learning Difficulties.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference among first, second and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Learning Difficulties

It is inferred from the above table that calculates 'F' value (25.228) is lesser than the table value (3.00) for df (2, 297) and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. It shows there is no significant difference among first, second and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Learning Difficulties.

Table 2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE HIGHER SECONDARY

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' value	Remarks at 5% level
Male	174	48.845	7.6826	2.521	S
Female	126	46.659	7.0236		

(At 5% level of significance, for df 298, the table value of 't' is 1.96)

Table 3 DIFFERENCE AMONG FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD GROUP OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH RESPECT TO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Variables	Sources	Sum of square	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	Calculate 'F' Value	Remarks at 5% Level
Group	Between	2428.911	2	1214.456	25.228	S
	Within	14297.475	297	48.140		
	Total	16726.387	299			

(At 5% level of significance, the table value of 'F' is 3.02)

Table 4 SCHEFFE TEST SHOWING DIFFERENCE AMONG FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD GROUP OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH RESPECT TO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Mean Value of Learning Difficulties with Respect to Group			
First	Second	Third	Remarks
45.52		45.82	
-	51.58	-	*
-	-	-	-

*The mean difference is significance at the 0.05 level.

The Scheffe test result shows that there is significant difference among first, second and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Learning Difficulties. There is significant difference between first and second group of higher secondary students with respect to Learning Difficulties, there is significant difference between second group and third group of higher secondary students

with respect to Learning Difficulties and also there is significant difference between third group students better than others group first and second group of higher secondary students.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary school students in their Learning Difficulties

It is inferred from the above table that calculated 't' value (6.082) is greater than the table value (1.96) for df 298 and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary school students in their Learning Difficulties.

It is inferred from the above table that, 37.0% of students have low, 49.0% of them have moderate and 25.7% of them have high level of school environment of students.

Table 5 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THEIR LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Locality	N	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' value	Remarks at 5% level
Rural	152	50.375	6.5850	6.082	S
Urban	148	45.412	7.5286		

(At 5% level of significance, for df 298, the table value of 't' is 1.96)

Table 6 LEVEL OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

Low		Moderate		High	
Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
53	17.7	187	62.3	80	20.0

Table 7 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THEIR ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' value	Remarks at 5% level
Male	174	136.701	12.2069	3.401	S
Female	126	141.706	13.0825		

(At 5% level of significance, for df 298, the table value of 't' is 1.96)

Null Hypothesis 4

There is no significant difference between male and female higher secondary school students in their Academic struggles.

It is inferred from the above table that calculated 't' value (3.401) is greater than the table value (1.96) for df 298 and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is no significant difference between male and female higher secondary school students in their Academic struggles.

Null Hypothesis 5

There is no significant difference among first, second and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Academic struggles.

It is inferred from the above table that calculates 'F' value (20.307) is lesser than the table value (3.00) for df (2, 297) and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows there is significant difference among first, second and third

group of higher secondary students with respect to Academic struggles.

The Scheffe test result shows that there is significant difference among first, second and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Academic struggles. There is significant difference between first and second group of higher secondary students with respect to Academic struggles, there is significant difference between second group and third group of higher secondary students with respect to Academic struggles and also there is significant difference between second group students better than others group first and Third group of higher secondary students.

Null Hypothesis 6

There is no significant difference between rural and urban higher secondary school students in their Academic struggles

It is inferred from the above table that calculated 't' value (6.082) is greater than the table value (1.96) for df 298 and at 5% level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is no significant

Table 8 DIFFERENCE AMONG FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD GROUP OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH RESPECT To ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Variables	Sources	Sum of square	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	Calculate 'F' Value	Remarks at 5% Level
Academic Struggles	Between	5894.877	2	2947.438	20.307	S
	Within	43108.520	297	145.147		
	Total	49003.397	299			

(At 5% level of significance, the table value of 'F' is 3.02)

Table 9 SCHEFFE TEST SHOWING DIFFERENCE AMONG FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD GROUP OF HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH RESPEC TO ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Mean Value of Academic struggles with Respect to Group			
First	Second	Third	Remarks
135.51		135.26	
-	144.50	-	*
-	-	-	-

*The mean difference is significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 10 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THEIR ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Locality	N	Mean	SD	Calculated 't' value	Remarks at 5% level
Rural	152	50.375	6.5850	6.082	S
Urban	148	45.412	7.5286		

(At 5% level of significance, for df 298, the table value of 't' is 1.96)

difference between rural and urban higher secondary school students in their Academic struggles.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal important insights into the learning difficulties and academic struggles experienced by higher secondary students. Analysis of the data shows that a majority of students face moderate levels of learning difficulties, with 49.3% falling into this category, while 37% have low difficulties and 13.7% experience high learning difficulties. This indicates that almost half of the students are moderately challenged in their learning processes, which could adversely impact their overall academic performance and motivation. A gender-wise comparison reveals that male students have significantly higher learning difficulties than their female counterparts, as evidenced by the calculated 't' value surpassing the critical value at the 5% significance level. This disparity points towards possible differences in cognitive, emotional, or socio-cultural factors affecting boys more adversely in academic contexts. Such findings call for gender-sensitive teaching approaches and additional support mechanisms specifically tailored for male students.

The study further explores the variation in learning difficulties across different academic streams (groups). The Scheffe post hoc analysis indicates significant differences among the first, second, and third groups, with the third group experiencing fewer

learning difficulties compared to the first and second groups. This may reflect differences in curriculum difficulty, teaching methods, or student aptitude across groups, highlighting the importance of differentiated instruction based on student needs and academic streams. Additionally, locality plays a critical role in learning difficulties. Rural students reported significantly higher levels of learning difficulties than urban students. This disparity could be attributed to limited access to quality education resources, infrastructure, and exposure to diverse learning environments in rural areas. It emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions and resource allocation to support rural students effectively.

Regarding academic struggles, the study reveals that most students (62.3%) experience moderate academic challenges, with 17.7% facing low struggles and 20% facing high struggles. Gender differences are again significant, with male students reporting more academic struggles than females. This pattern suggests that male students may require additional academic counseling and support services to help them cope with educational demands. The analysis of academic groups shows significant differences as well; the second group exhibits higher academic struggles compared to the first and third groups, indicating possible variations in academic pressure, workload, or study habits among these groups. The rural-urban divide is also evident in academic struggles, with rural students struggling more academically than their urban peers. This could reflect systemic

inequities in educational quality, teaching expertise, and learning environments between rural and urban schools.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION

The findings of this study have important educational implications for schools, teachers, and policymakers. Recognizing that learning difficulties and academic struggles vary significantly across gender, academic groups, and locality, educational institutions must adopt inclusive and flexible teaching approaches. Schools should implement early identification and intervention programs to support students facing learning challenges, especially those from rural areas and male students who showed higher difficulties. Teacher training programs need to emphasize strategies for handling diverse learner needs, including personalized instruction and counseling services. Furthermore, curriculum designers should consider tailoring content and assessment methods to accommodate the varying academic capabilities across different streams. Enhancing the school environment by fostering supportive and resource-rich settings will also play a crucial role in mitigating learning barriers. Overall, these implications stress the need for a holistic, student-centered approach to education that promotes equitable learning opportunities and helps all students reach their full academic potential.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant challenges faced by higher secondary students in terms of learning difficulties and academic struggles. The results clearly show that these challenges are not uniform but vary significantly based on gender, academic group, and locality. Male students and those from rural areas tend to experience higher levels of difficulties, indicating the need for focused attention on these groups. The differences among

academic streams further suggest that curriculum design and instructional methods must be adaptable to cater to diverse student needs. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach involving teachers, schools, policymakers, and communities to create supportive learning environments, provide targeted interventions, and ensure equitable access to educational resources. Ultimately, overcoming these barriers will promote better academic achievement, improved self-confidence, and holistic development among students, preparing them for future success.

Ethical Approval

No ethical approval was necessary for this study.

Author Contribution

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception, design, acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work. They were involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content. All authors gave final approval of the version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring its accuracy and integrity.

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