

# Learning Orientation and Perceived Parental Attitudes of Students at the Senior Secondary Level

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## Abstract

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*The study was conducted to examine the learning orientation of students at Senior Secondary level and also to explore its linkages with parental attitudes. The sample of 135 students studying in class XI and their respective parents (135 fathers & 135 mothers) was drawn randomly from two Senior Secondary schools of Delhi. Two separate tools namely questionnaire for students and questionnaire for parents developed and validated by the researcher were used. The study brought out clearly shows that interest orientation was the most influencing factor in learning. Career orientation of students was linked with interest orientation and examination orientation. The study also revealed that students at senior secondary level generally had high orientation towards exams and career. There was no significant difference between boys and girls regarding their approach to exams and career. Also parental influence especially parental support affected the learning orientation of children.*

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## Introduction

In the history of mankind, education has formed a continuum and a basis for the development of human society. Through development of attitudes, values and capabilities both of knowledge and skill, education provides resilience to people to respond to changing situations and enables them to contribute to social development.

Learning is the heart of educational process. Learners situationally fall along the continuum of learning orientation. Learning orientation, disposition to approach, manage and achieve learning. They provide a perspective to the understanding of higher order psychological domain to differentiate students' capacity to learn. Learning orientation is a complex, multi-

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dimensional concept influenced by various socio-cultural, personal and other antecedent factors. Many endogenous as well as exogenous variables have their impact on the learning orientations of individuals.

Martinez (1998) identified three primary learning differences variables:

- (1) **Connative:** This factor refers to the individual's will, commitment, interest, drive or passion for improving, transferring and achieving goals.
- (2) **Committed learning:** This factor refers to individual's desire to take responsibilities, make choices, control and improve their own learning.
- (3) **Learning autonomy:** It refers to the degree that learners deliberately start and make efforts to accomplish learning.

Students pursue studies for various reasons. It is worthwhile to identify an individual's orientation to learn, by looking at the dominant factors that affect learning. Three major orientations have been examined in the present study viz., Examination Orientation, Career Orientation and Interest Orientation.

#### **Examination Orientation**

Students are very much influenced by their urge to perform well in examinations. Educational qualifications are used extensively as a screening device for recruitment, selection and promotion in modern sector salaried employment. This has led to an intense demand for schooling and certificates. Since these certificates are awarded on

the basis of examinations, the educational institutions have become mere places of preparing students for examinations. The dominance of the examination has relegated every other function of the educational institution into the background. Obtaining good marks is the top priority for students.

#### **Career Orientation**

Career Orientation is another influencing factor for students. The linkage between employment and education is a complex phenomenon. The socio-psychological dimensions of the relationship between education and employment give an insight into the career orientation of students. For a great number of students studying is just to pass the examination and obtain the certificates which will open the gates of the world of work to them.

A search for self-improvement has today become a quest for gainful employment. Learning is now viewed as a means to an end where individual preferences get eclipsed by the larger scheme of things. In fact, occupation/career which one chooses influence all other aspects of living perhaps more than any other single factor.

#### **Interest Orientation**

Another orientation observed in students is their interest towards learning. For some learning is a rewarding experience. For some, others pursuit of knowledge is a pleasurable endeavour. And there are children who study to develop their interests. Many researches have indicated the positive implications of intrinsic motivation in learning. In

addition, to these situations of learning orientation another significant factor that affects students' decision to learn is family influence.

### **Family Influence**

The family may be regarded as a reservoir of experiences that lead to the growth and development of personality. The influence of family on occupational and educational attainment has been a subject of great interest to vocational and career educators and researchers alike.

The following are the significant family influence factors that affect a child's career and educational decisions.

1. Geographical location, 2. Genetic inheritance, 3. Family background 4. Socio- economic status, 5. Family's composition, 6. Parenting style and 7. Parents' work related attitudes. Whereas the first four of these factors have a strong influence in a child's physical and mental abilities, education and employment opportunities and financial resources, the last three have a profound effect on a child's personality, preference for certain types of interpersonal relationship, work attitudes and willingness to pursue a non-traditional career. It is also worthwhile to remember that the career development process begins long before the adult years.

Children build their own structures of behaviour through parents, friends, neighbours, tradition, education, culture and the mass media.

### **Parental Attitudes**

Education cannot be dealt in isolation. It is an all-inclusive term, which means 'to bring up'. The development of the all

round personality of a child is not the exclusive responsibility of the teachers. Parents' role is pivotal especially in the choice of subject after high school.

A number of studies have shown that parents potentially influence adolescents' activity choices and occupational identities. Parental attitudes like support, pressure and anxiety have a great impact on decisions that have implications for the future, such as choice of career.

De Ridder (1990) observed that parents as daily models provide cultural standards, attitudes and expectations and in many ways determine the essential adequacy of self acceptance and confidence of social skills. In a similar vein Grimsted and Way (1993) are of the opinion that by increasing the communication between home and children the positive aspects of family influence in the career development of children can be enhanced.

Parents' expectation too can weigh heavily on a child. Youngsters may want to please their parents and they would go to any extent to gain their parents' approval. A child who constantly feels the obligation to perform for friends and family may inordinately fear failure.

Parental pressure concerning career can take many forms. There are obvious forms of pressure like parents holding financial strings over a child's head while expecting them to follow a specific career path and there are more subtle forms of pressure as well, such as discouraging a child from taking a certain career direction instead of listening to what they want.

### **Rationale for Study**

The aim of the present study was to understand and examine learning orientation and the perceived parental attitudes of students at senior secondary level. Despite the potential family child relationships in promoting achievements in adolescents, there is little discussion on how it can influence children's learning orientation. The study was to fill the gap by clarifying why and how parental attitudes are important variables in understanding the orientation of students at the higher secondary level and also their long term identity goals.

Although identity consolidation is achieved later, Senior Secondary level is the most crucial period when career decisions are taken by adolescents.

This study was designed to understand and examine the role of parents in the academic activities of students which would lead to a better understanding of the educational dynamics. Thus, the study has relevance from both the educational and sociological points of view.

### **Objectives of the study**

The major objective of the study was to examine the relationship between various learning orientations and the role of perceived parental attitudes

The specific objectives were:

- (1) To examine the learning orientation of students in terms of examination, career and Interest.
- (2) To find if boys and girls differ in their orientation in terms of examination, career and interest
- (3) To study parental attitude towards their children's studies
- (4) To examine whether fathers differ from mothers in their attitudes towards their child's studies.
- (5) To find if there is significant correlation between student orientation and the perceived parental attitudes.

Based on the objectives cited, following hypotheses have been made.

### **Hypothesis**

- (1) There is no correlation between student orientation in terms of examination, career and Interest.
- (2) There is no difference between boys and girls in their orientation in terms of examination, career and interest.
- (3) There is no difference between fathers and mothers in their attitude to their child's studies.
- (4) There is no significant correlation between learning orientation and the perceived parental attitudes.

### **Design of the Study**

#### **Tools**

Initially the investigator referred to a wide variety of inventories and questionnaires given in the handbooks of psychological tests. But it was felt that standard tests might not cover all the aspects to be covered in the study. Hence, two questionnaires were developed and validated.

**1. Student Questionnaire** It comprised of two parts

#### **A Student learning orientation inventory**

### **B. Perceived parental attitudes**

#### **A. Inventory Student Learning Orientation**

For the purpose of this study, as already described, three learning orientations were identified. They are (i) Examination orientation, (ii) Career orientation and (iii) Interest orientation.

Initially a pool of over 100 items was developed. After considerable deliberations and discussions, and informal testing with students, the scales were finalised as follows:

- (1) Examination orientation
- (2) Career orientation
- (3) Interest orientation

The 25 items were in the Likert Format with four responses,

Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree

The items were scored from 4 to 1 with scores reversed for negatively worded items. Higher scores indicate stronger orientation.

#### **B. Perceived parental attitude**

To study the perception of parental attitude, three dimensions of attitude towards their child were identified for this study. They are:

- (1) Support
- (2) Pressure
- (3) Anxiety

To distinguish between the attitudes of parents separately, identical items were developed to measure the attitudes of mothers and fathers which were also in the Likert Format on a four point scale.

#### **The Sample and Data Collection**

The questionnaires were administered to a sample of 135 students from two Senior Secondary schools in Delhi. The sample consisted of 75 boys and 60 girls studying in Standard XI. These students were from Science, Commerce and Humanities streams. They were in the age group 15 - 17. The medium of instruction in both the schools was English and hence, there was no problem in administering the questionnaire in English.

#### **Data analysis**

To compare the strength of the different learning orientations, the means and standard deviation for all the three orientations were worked out for both boys and girls separately. As the numbers of items in these scales were different, the scores were normalised. To examine whether boys and girls differ significantly in their learning orientation, t-scores were worked out. These are shown in Table - 1

The tables indicates that interest orientation had the highest mean for both boys and girls at 0.747 and 0.741

Table-1

**Normalised means, standard deviations and t-score for the Learning Orientation Scale**

| <i>Dimensions</i>       | <i>Mean<br/>Boys<br/>N=75</i> | <i>Std.Dev.</i> | <i>Mean<br/>Girls<br/>N=60</i> | <i>Degree<br/>of<br/>Freedom</i> | <i>Std.Dev.</i> | <i>t score</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Examination Orientation | 0.647                         | 0.099           | 0.660                          | 0.098                            | 135             | 0.756          |
| Career Orientation      | 0.709                         | 0.113           | 0.702                          | 0.120                            | 135             | 0.362          |
| Interest Orientation    | 0.747                         | 0.072           | 0.741                          | 0.071                            | 135             | 0.491          |

respectively. This means that high rating is given to the intrinsic orientation in learning. Next in the order of ranking is career orientation with a mean of 0.709 for boys and 0.702 for girls. The mean score is lowest in Examination Orientation with 0.647 and 0.660 for boys and girls, respectively. This study has shown that contrary to general belief, examination orientation gets a lower score than career orientation or interest orientation.

There is no statistical difference in the scores between boys and girls at all. Scores are insignificant. At Senior

Secondary level between girls and boys studying in English medium schools and coming from middle and upper middle class background, there seems to be no statistically significant difference.

### Perception of Parental Attitudes

Perception scores of boys and girls about their parents's attitudes towards their academic activities have been recorded in Table-2.

Regarding the perception of the attitude of fathers, both boys and girls found their fathers to be supportive (boys

Table -2  
Normalised Means, standard deviations and t -score for Students

| Dimensions    | Boys N = 75 |       | Girsl N = 75 |       | Gegree of Freedom | t score |
|---------------|-------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------------------|---------|
|               | Mean        | S.D.  | Mean         | S.D.  |                   |         |
| <b>Father</b> |             |       |              |       |                   |         |
| Support       | 0.747       | 0.113 | 0.740        | 0.108 | 135               | 0.347   |
| Pressure      | 0.516       | 0.141 | 0.513        | 0.143 | 135               | 0.143   |
| Anxiety       | 0.624       | 0.109 | 0.636        | 0.110 | 135               | 0.628   |
| <b>Mother</b> |             |       |              |       |                   |         |
| Support       | 0.690       | 0.107 | 0.688        | 0.098 | 135               | 0.093   |
| Pressure      | 0.554       | 0.096 | 0.556        | 0.099 | 135               | 0.109   |
| Anxiety       | 0.679       | 0.115 | 0.694        | 0.107 | 135               | 0.770   |

0.747 and girls 0.740). The next dimension is parental anxiety with 0.624 for boys and 0.636 for girls. Pressure has the lowest mean score of 0.516 and 0.513 for boys and girls respectively. All the t-scores are insignificant indicating that there is no difference between boys and girls perception of their father's attitude.

Regarding the perception of mothers' attitude, the pattern is the same among boys and girls. Here again mothers' support gets the highest score, with boys 0.690 and girls 0.688 followed by anxiety with 0.679 and 0.694 for boys and girls

respectively. Mean score is lowest in Mothers' Pressure with 0.554 for boys and 0.556 for girls.

These findings indicate that while support is perceived to be high, anxiety on the part of the parents seems to be higher than pressure. This shows that children are conscious of their parents' anxiety about their studies. It is possible that generally parental anxiety is perceived as pressure.

Comparing the perception of the attitude of father and mother as perceived by boys and girls, both have

indicated that they receive more support from father as compared to mother. Highest score is for father's support with 0.747 against 0.690 for mothers' support. Similarly, girls mean score for father's support is 0.740 compared to 0.688 for mother's support.

Comparing the perception of anxiety, both boys and girls perceived mothers to be showing more anxiety than fathers. Mean score for mother's anxiety is 0.679 for boys as compared to 0.624 for father's anxiety. Similarly, in girls 0.694 is for mother's anxiety compared to 0.636 for father's anxiety. Again, mothers seemed to be exerting more pressure than fathers. Boys 0.554 for mothers' pressure compared to 0.516 for father's pressure. Girls have given a score of 0.556 for mother's pressure compared to 0.513 for father.

In general, both boys and girls see their fathers as more supportive and putting less pressure and showing less anxiety compared to their mothers.

#### Correlation between various Scales:

To examine whether there are any relationship between the various learning orientations and the perceived parental attitude, correlation was worked out for boys and girls separately and these are shown in table 3 and 4 respectively.

It is noticed that as far as correlation between various learning orientations are concerned, the pattern between boys and girls are similar. It can be inferred that examination orientation has a significant correlation with both career orientation and interest orientation. That is those who have a high examination orientation also show a high career and interest orientation. On the other hand, there is no correlation between interest orientation and career orientation. This indicates that examination seems to be more dominant in deciding career and interest while no significant relationship exists between interest in learning and career orientation.

Table - 3  
Correlation between the Scales - Boys

| Correlation Matrix             | Scales        |               |      |       |              |              |      |      |      |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------|------|-------|--------------|--------------|------|------|------|
| Boys                           |               |               |      |       |              |              |      |      |      |
| Scales                         | 1             | 2             | 3    | 4     | 5            | 6            | 7    | 8    | 9    |
| <b>Examination Orientation</b> | 1.00          |               |      |       |              |              |      |      |      |
| <b>Career Orientation</b>      | <b>0.25**</b> | 1.00          |      |       |              |              |      |      |      |
| <b>Interest Orientation</b>    | <b>0.26**</b> | 0.03          | 1.00 |       |              |              |      |      |      |
| <b>Father Support</b>          | <b>0.28**</b> | <b>0.30**</b> | 0.16 | 1.00  |              |              |      |      |      |
| <b>Father Pressure</b>         | -0.01         | -0.11         | 0.14 | 0.10  | 1.00         |              |      |      |      |
| <b>Father Anxiety</b>          | 0.16          | 0.04          | 0.14 | 0.15  | 0.15         | 1.00         |      |      |      |
| <b>Mother Support</b>          | 0.14          | 0.10          | 0.17 | 0.07  | -0.06        | 0.16         | 1.00 |      |      |
| <b>Mother Pressure</b>         | 0.11          | 0.17          | 0.04 | -0.09 | <b>0.31*</b> | 0.13         | 0.19 | 1.00 |      |
| <b>Mother Anxiety</b>          | 0.16          | 0.17          | 0.03 | 0.09  | 0.09         | <b>0.39*</b> | 0.03 | 0.14 | 1.00 |

\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level



Table -4  
**Inter correlation between the scales- Girls**

| Scales                         | Scales        |              |               |              |              |             |       |      |      |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------|------|------|
|                                | 1             | 2            | 3             | 4            | 5            | 6           | 7     | 8    | 9    |
| <b>Examination Orientation</b> | 1.00          |              |               |              |              |             |       |      |      |
| <b>Career Orientation</b>      | <b>0.37**</b> | 1.00         |               |              |              |             |       |      |      |
| <b>Interest Orientation</b>    | <b>0.36**</b> | 0.03         | 1.00          |              |              |             |       |      |      |
| <b>Father Support</b>          | <b>0.27**</b> | <b>0.38</b>  | <b>0.28</b>   | 1.00         |              |             |       |      |      |
| <b>Father Pressure</b>         | 0.05          | -0.04        | <b>0.23</b>   | -0.02        | 1.00         |             |       |      |      |
| <b>Father Anxiety</b>          | -0.08         | -0.02        | -0.15         | <b>-0.41</b> | 0.08         | 1.00        |       |      |      |
| <b>Mother Support</b>          | <b>0.25**</b> | <b>0.27*</b> | <b>0.25**</b> | <b>0.29*</b> | 0.10         | 0.01        | 1.00  |      |      |
| <b>Mother Pressure</b>         | 0.05          | -0.04        | <b>0.23</b>   | -0.02        | <b>0.36*</b> | -0.10       | 0.10  | 1.00 |      |
| <b>Mother Anxiety</b>          | 0.18          | 0.19         | 0.04          | -0.05        | 0.03         | <b>0.32</b> | -0.10 | 0.03 | 1.00 |

\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

As far as correlation between learning orientation and perception of parental attitude is concerned there are some differences between boys and girls. Boys have reported a significant relationship between fathers support with both career and examination orientation. There is also significant statistical relationship between the perceived pressure and anxiety of both father and mother. That is those boys who perceive their fathers to be exerting pressure and showing anxiety perceived their mothers also in a similar way. The earlier analysis showed mothers to be showing more anxiety and putting more pressure than fathers.

As far as the girls are concerned, fathers support is related to all the three learning orientations. That is fathers' support seems to influence all the three learning orientations. It is interesting to note a significant negative correlation of 0.41 between fathers' anxiety and fathers' support. It implies that those fathers who are perceived to be supportive show less anxiety. There is

significant correlation between the perceived pressure, anxiety and support of both fathers and mothers. In other words girls seem to perceive the same attitude from both the parents.

### Major findings

#### Learning Orientation

- Interest orientation is the strongest influencing factor in learning for students at senior secondary level. followed by career orientation.
- Examination orientation has the least influence in learning.
- There is no statistical difference between boys and girls in their learning dispositions.
- Examination orientation has a significant correlation with both career orientation and interest orientation.

#### Perceived Parental Attitudes

- Both boys and girls perceived their parents to be supportive.
- They received more support from fathers as compared to their mother.



- Both boys and girls perceived mothers to be showing more anxiety than fathers.
- Mothers seemed to be exerting more pressure than fathers.

### **CONCLUSION**

Education has a very wide connotation as it concerns every individual in the society. The process of learning is the vehicle by which the individual is changed from a bundle of potentialities to an active organism with ideas, habits, skills, preferences and other distinguishing personality characters. The various factors in learning would include influences, which have to do with the direction in which the learning process moves.

The research problem of the present study was to examine the learning orientation of students at Sr. Secondary level and also to explore the linkages between parental attitude and academic orientation of children.

This study has brought out clearly that career orientation of students is linked with interest orientation and examination orientation. The study also reveals that students at senior secondary level generally have high orientation towards exams and career.

The scores of the items in career orientation throw light on the fact that contrary to general beliefs, adolescents have clarity about their future vocation. They seem to know the source from where to get career guidance. The comparatively higher score in interest orientation can be interpreted that students find the subjects in their course interesting. Studying the subject that

they are interested gives them a lot of personal satisfaction. They look for a career where they can develop their interest and where there is promise of growth. They would like to be creative and original. The findings also indicate that there is no difference between boys and girls regarding their approach to exams and career. Parental influence especially parental support affects the academic orientation of children at Class XI level.

Family plays a significant role in the educational progress of the children. The present study revealed that parental influence especially parental support affects the academic orientation of children at Class XI. As regards to parental pressure Class XI students hardly feel parental pressure. On the other hand they derive encouragement especially from fathers. This would make children more competent, and less apprehensive about their future. Family anxieties do not seem to significantly affect the academic orientation.

The study also reveals that both boys and girls are not much affected by parental pressure. It is generally believed that most of today's parents pressurise their children into doing what they (parents) want them to do. However, this study has shown that though there is parental pressure, support is perceived to be greater than pressure. At the same time parents are ambitious that their children ensure future security and have financial stability.

### **Implication**

As children enter the large world making choices becomes a way of asserting themselves. To be able to experience the

freedom to choose predisposes children to view the world as a less threatening place and the chances of being successful are increased. Therefore, it is very important to give space to the adolescents to make their own career choice. Parents must adopt a style which would boost the self confidence of children and facilitate academic orientation.

On the other hand, pressures to conform and fulfill parents' expectations regarding education and career can cause a poor fit between the individual. The study implies that family functioning which includes parental support, guidance, positive or negative influences, and family members' interaction style has a greater impact on career development than either family structure or parents' educational and occupational status. This also implies that interaction

between parents and children is a powerful influence. In fact, proactive parents can facilitate academic orientation and career development process.

Understanding the impact of learning orientations would also provide an opportunity to create more successful learning orientations for learners. This study should be of value to the schools to solve many behavioural problems encountered in the schools, which go unsolved in school system. It would enable the teachers to understand the children and their peculiarities in proper perspective and to plan their behavioural dynamics accordingly.

The study would also help the students in matters of career choice or vocation, which in turn would ease the frustration and dilemma which they face when they are at the crossroads.

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