

## EFFECTS OF TEACHERS' COMMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS ON THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore and describe the feelings and emotions of the students studying in both SSC (Matriculation) and GCE (Ordinary Level) systems of schools in Karachi, Pakistan when their teachers pass comments and/or communicate expectations from them. It further seeks to identify the response of students on it and the effects of these comments and expectations on students' performance. This is a qualitative study based on the design of phenomenological inquiry. Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured open-ended interviews and results were critically analyzed and interpreted. The focus of this study was mainly on the student's experiences because it is very crucial for the educators and decision makers to analyze and understand the students' position about certain phenomenon. Student's personal experiences regarding this issue are discussed at length in this paper. When I started analyzing the data I realized that the students from GCE system expressed a strong belief that their teacher's expectations have a profound effect on the formulation of their self-perception and on their motivational level. On the other hand however some students from the matriculation side expressed very reluctantly that they don't have much experience of this phenomenon in their school settings. This paper endeavors to bring to light the interconnection between teacher expectations with self-awareness, self-discipline, self-assurance, motivation and anxiety in a few cases as emerged from the data collected for this study.

**KEY WORDS:** Teachers' Comments, Teachers' Expectations, Self-awareness, Self-discipline, Self-assurance

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## INTRODUCTION

Expectations from students can be used as an effective tool as a teacher and by using this tool effectively entire academic career of students can be changed. This tool can enhance academic performance and can produce high achievements (Capel, Leask & Turner, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1988; Brookover et al., 1982). Researchers believe that one person's expectations for another person serve as a self-assessment tool for the second person. Thus teacher's feedback and comments for students' potential ability ultimately become the mean of self-awareness for the students (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Researchers have a strong opinion that children of lower ages are more receptive and vulnerable (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Raudenbush, 1984) than the high grade students. They make mental images about themselves (Velez, 2006) and when high expectations are articulated about them they make high self-images. On the other hand if they are facing negative comments and low expectations from their teachers and people around them, their self-images can be lowered resulting in lower academic performance (Brophy, 1986). A constant negative feedback can shatter their confidence level affecting the whole personality as these images remain with them for the whole of their lives. A strong relationship between expectations and academic achievement has been well established both theoretically and empirically (Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz, and Slate, 2000; Marzano, 2003). Hayman (1981) after a broad review of pertaining to school academic achievements, has found that if certain attitudes are reinforced consistently in a particular direction, they become self-perceptions and students begin to accept these signals as a reflection of reality.

Atta et al (2011) explained that counterfeit estimation not only affects the academic performance of the students but it affects the attitudes, interests, intelligence, behavior and personality as well. As a result individuals lose confidence and make mistakes. If this practice continues the students thinking power is decreased, they focus on present rather than on future and start indulging in distressing thoughts and negative feelings.

Swann (1987) found that when a constant positive feedback is provided by some genuine comments, it increases the performance of the student. Similarly if student is given a dose of constant negative verbal comments it affects badly. Self-awareness plays a very important role in shaping the personality of the individuals.

Researchers have discovered a cyclic pattern between teachers' expectations and students' achievements (e.g. Rizwana, 2009; Atwell, 2001; Brookover et al., 1982; Good & Brophy, 2000; Jussim, 1986; Jussim et al., 2005; Jussim & Harber, 2005). They report that teachers' expectations can significantly influence students' achievements. After the publication of 'Pygmalion in the classrooms' by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), researchers have been trying to explore how teachers communicate their expectations to their students and how these affect their students' achievements. However, this paper will put into light the student's version of the phenomenon by investigating the effects of teacher's comments and expectations over the students in different school systems and belonging to different social classes of the society.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how teachers in different school settings in Karachi form expectations for their students. The main focus of this study was to take the student's version about the effects of teachers' expectations on their performance, how teachers attempt to communicate their expectations to them and how students respond to them. This study intends to address the following questions to understand in depth the phenomena of teachers' expectations from the angle of students.

- 1) What are the student's experiences about teacher's expectations in different school settings?
- 2) What are the feelings of the students when their teachers express expectations from them?
- 3) What are the student's beliefs about the relationship of self-perception and teacher expectations?
- 4) What is the student's thinking about the relationship of self-discipline and teacher expectations?
- 5) What is student's stance about teacher expectations and anxiety?
- 6) What are the student's experiences about the relationship between performance and expectation?
- 7) How do students think and react against high and low expectation from their teachers?

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study based on the design of phenomenological inquiry. The purpose of this study was mainly to explore and highlight the student's experiences about teachers' comments and expectations and their effects on their academic performance. The issue is very crucial for the educators and decision makers to analyze and understand the students' position about certain phenomenon especially in the social context of Pakistani system of education. Student's personal experiences regarding this issue are discussed at length in this paper. The study involves 20 students from GCE system of schools with ages ranging between 15 to 17 years from eight different schools of Karachi, Pakistan. A gender balance was required to avoid gender issues in the selection of participants, for this 12 girls and 8 boys were selected. On the other side from matriculation system of schools, 30 students were selected of which 20 boys and 10 girls with ages ranging between 14 to 16 years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from each participant and notes were taken. Later data were analyzed following the three C's model (Rizwana, 2009) of data analysis that is initial coding, identifying the categories and developing concepts/ themes. On the basis of analyzed data conclusions were drawn and concrete recommendations were presented.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section findings of the study are presented with an analysis of how teacher’s comments and expectations affect students learning outcomes, self-perception, self-discipline, self-assurance, motivation level and anxiety.

Phenomenon	Students’ Beliefs		Students’ Experiences	
	GCE	Matriculation	GCE	Matriculation
<b>Self-Perception</b>	Students showed a fair degree of beliefs upon their teachers in the development of their perceptions about themselves.	Students showed relatively more strong beliefs upon their teachers in this regard.	Students responded critically about the role of teachers’ expectations in the building their perceptions.	Students shared their experiences about teachers submissively
<b>Self-Reliance</b>	Students confirmed a strong faith on the role of teachers’ comments in the development of self-reliance among students.	Students demonstrated a relatively fair level of faith in this regard.	Students shared moderately more positive events.	Experiences of both types have been observed but a section of this group expressed comparatively more negative experiences.

<p><b>Motivation Level</b></p>	<p>A strong belief was observed on the comments of teachers in increasing or decreasing the motivation level.</p>	<p>A firm conviction has been seen in these students as well regarding the positive and negative effects of teachers' remarks.</p>	<p>Students shared both motivating and de-motivating comments passed by their teachers.</p>	<p>Students expressed both type of experiences.</p>
<p><b>Anxiety</b></p>	<p>A slight belief has been found mostly among the high scorer students.</p>	<p>Comparatively more students from this group expressed this fear.</p>	<p>Students did not share any event or experience regarding this phenomenon.</p>	<p>No concrete evidence has been presented.</p>

*Students believe that teacher's comments and feedback play a vital role in development of self-perception*

All the students who were interviewed expressed the almost the same thoughts about the significance of teacher's comments and both types of positive and negative effects of these remarks and anticipations. One of a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student zaid from GCE side expressed:

I was very weak in mathematics because I always feel it as a difficult subject and due to this fear I never got good grades. In grade nine one of my mathematics teacher who was very good teacher and become my favorite afterwards said, "Zaid I am seeing your A-grade in the GCE (O-Level) international examination" I could not believe on these remarks given by the teacher for me but then I think that if teacher is saying this, he must have seen the capability and potential in me that is why he is saying so. After this I started taking interest doing more practice..... Now after one year I have made a drastic change in my results.

It has been noticed during the interviews that students belonging to lower middle class families and mostly from the matriculation side articulated more reliance and faith upon their teachers and expressed very strong beliefs about them.

Shahrukh a 9<sup>th</sup> grade student from a matriculation system school argued that:

“I act upon the advice of my teachers because I believe that they know it well that what are my capabilities and strengths..... I believe that my teachers know me better than even myself”.

Moreover a 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl Saba stated:

“When my teacher criticizes me I never argue against it because I believe that my teacher is always right and think good for me.....”

Students shared with me their personal experiences of facing severe problems in different subjects stating negative feedback of the teachers as a major factor for the problem. They illuminated the positive side of the phenomenon as well.

BismaNaseem a 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl from GCE side shared one of her experiences:

I used to hate mathematics because I often got failed in this subject. On a parent teachers meeting my mathematics teacher said to my mother that your daughter cannot do mathematics. I remember her words, she said, “You are never going to pass the GCE international examination” just in front of my mother and my friends. That made me feel very bad. My confidence shattered and mathematics became even more difficult afterward for me. For the whole year I was always insulted in the class by teacher’s bad comments for me..... In the next grade I got a very good tutor at home who entirely changed my perception about the subject as well as about myself. He first identified my problem, gave me concrete tips and always encouraged me to do rigorous practice..... In the final examinations of the school I got A\* in mathematics. My teacher was stunned to see my result. She said, “I cannot believe it is your result”.

*Teacher’s remarks and positive feedback is considered as an essential element for self-reliance by the students*

Students feel that teacher’s pedagogies, their actions and their words help them in building self-confidence and self-reliance. All the participants agreed to this conception and no rejection was observed for the phenomenon in both groups.

An O-Level student Sehrish Gilani told me an event that happened with her some years back:

I was very good in all subjects but due to some reason I always used to do silly mistakes in mathematics. I was facing this problem since grade-6 but I could not overcome this problem till grade-8, then I found a teacher who worked on me in such a way that he boosted my confidence by creating recurring circumstance for praising my work and..... My tutor shared his strategy with me at the end of session. I still remember his words when he started teaching me, he said, “You have a very analytical mind, I don’t believe that the results you are showing me are yours”. He told me that he purposely used to stop at different points during the solution of questions and used to ask me to solve the next step please I have been stuck. I used to believe that he is really stuck. So I often strive hard to solve the next step. On doing this I always got good remarks and praise ..... In this way my fear for the subject got eradicated. I got A\* in mathematics in GCE (O-Level) which was a miracle for me.

A 10<sup>th</sup> grade student Mudassir gave his example:

I am good in science subjects but the grey area for me in these subjects was the graphs and diagrams. I never tried to take it serious and never made serious effort to solve this problem. But instead this I was used to take help of my elder sister in making graphs and diagrams for me.

One day my chemistry teacher said, “Just do it don’t be afraid of marks I will give you full marks on diagrams made by you”. He started to give me small assignments of drawing graphs and diagrams sitting in front of him..... I did this for a month and now I am very good in this area.

*Students believe that there is a strong interconnection between the expectations and the motivation level*

Rizwana(2009) found a wide range of ways, such as reinforcing concepts, tailoring their instructions and adapting the curriculum to children with learning difficulties who have generally lower academic self-perception (Montgomery, 1994) to enable the students to do the tasks successfully and feel motivated. Most of the students feel motivation whenever they are given positive feedback about their work. They shared their experiences regarding the phenomenon by the phrases:

“I feel motivation when someone especially teacher praises me”.

“I feel myself motivated when teachers assign marks for certain tasks”

“Till the moment I keep on understanding something, I feel myself motivated”



The issue of promoting self-esteem in students to enhance their academic achievements is clearly an important issue for the teachers (Velez, 2006). The first phrase expressed by one of the respondent shows that the students are observing the same strategy by some of their teachers in their school settings. The second phrase by another participant indicates the practice found by Diamond, Randolph and Spillane (2004) during his research that in some schools teachers who had a strong sense of responsibility for students' performance adjust their instructional practices to meet students' needs rather than to follow the fixed structures. The third phrase also shows the instructional strategies of the teachers should be designed to keep the interest of the students alive in learning process.

Most surprisingly it has been found through the interviews of the students belonging to lower middle class families that these students do better after the rebuke by the teachers instead of being praised. When I asked these students including girls to explain this why are they behaving in an unnatural way? They replied almost the same:

“We start learning with more care and effort if teacher scolds us on some mistake. We do better to avoid the insult from the teacher in front of the whole class rather than after getting good remarks from the teacher as this happened rarely.

Moreover students have grievance against their parents. These students revealed that some parents have unrealistic expectations from them and they communicate to them repeatedly. This factor has been told by the student a hurdle and de-motivating for them.

*Students believe that teachers' expectations are a factor for anxiety*

It has been reported by some of the students that unrealistic expectations from parents as well as from teachers sometimes create a cause of anxiety and distress among them. One of a grade 10th student Aamir, who holds position in his class, expressed the feelings of pressure and fear after teacher expectations.

He said: “I always feel depressed whenever my teachers expects from me the same high grades. I have this feeling because of a fear of doing mistakes and not meeting the expectations”.

Teachers and parents should try to have more realistic expectations from the students rather than to keep on pushing them for the things they cannot do.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the data taken from the detailed interviews of the students studying in a complete contrast educational settings and conditions very interesting and important results have been found. The personal experiences shared by the students confirmed a strong and everlasting effect of teacher comments on the students' self-assessment, self-reliance, self-discipline and on their motivation level in both educational settings with a difference of magnitude and frequency. It has been noticed a reluctant behavior in sharing the personal experiences related to their teachers and school environment by the participants of the schools from matriculation system in the social context of Pakistan. The study suggests a more frequent and healthy interaction by the teachers with their students to make them at ease and expressive. It has been confirmed by many researches (Rizwana 2009) on this issue that during the early ages, children make self-images under the influence of the people interacting with them especially the teachers. This study also found the role of stereotype remarks by the teachers that become a stigma for the students. They make false images and perceptions about themselves and about different subjects that consequently affect severely the academic performance. The study recommends for the primary teachers to be very careful in passing the comments and giving feedback to lower grade students. It is recommend giving positive feedback to young children, not directly in the form of praising words but by first creating a situation in which students can perform well and then giving them praise and reward. It has been identified from the reflections of students during the study that a drastic academic excellence can be achieved even by those students who were not good enough at certain stage of their academic life. The use of this phenomenon as an instructional technique is therefore recommended for the students who are at risk to prevent dropouts.

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