

# Problems Associated with Poor Academic Achievement: The Case of Biftu Nekemet High School Firafis Dereje (Jimma University)

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**Abstract:** *This study was conducted to assess the problems associated with poor academic achievement in Biftu Nekemet high school, Nekemet town, Oromia using descriptive study design. Within the quantitative research approach, stratified sampling techniques were employed. Data were collected using questionnaire, interview and document analysis so as to generate information. 86 (66 male and 20 females) samples of students were filled questionnaire and five different department teachers and two school director were interviewed. Data was analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics such as percent, bar graph, pie chart and table. The study revealed that the key factors that contributes to poor academic achievement of the student were personal causal factor, school casual factor, environmental causal factor and parental causal factor. Moreover, the study infer that educational and occupational level of parents, lack of motivation and feeling of worthlessness appear to be some of the main important environmental factors that affect achievement. The study finding showed that the educational level of most of the parents is too elementary and occupational wise also engaged in low paying physical labor. Furthermore, proper child rearing practice and motivation has a tremendous contribution to achievement which in the case of the present study is not observed. The other results of the finding infer that majority of the students encountered with fear when taking examination, frustration, lack of professional school counselor and other related psychological factor.*

**Keywords:** Students, Teachers, Poor academic achievement, Under achievement, Environmental condition, Problems, Nekemet, Oromia.

## 1. The Study Context

In an academic setting where high or satisfactory school achievement is regarded as expected behavior and poor or low achievement is regarded undesirable one, it has been hypothesized by a number of investigators that academic achievement must be related to factors indicative of personal, social, psychological and economical variables.

The importance of the family to children's academic performance is well documented in numerous studies showing that a large proportion of children who fail in school are from disadvantaged families. The period of most rapid rate of growth of intelligence and achievement occurs during the first few years of life when the family's influence is paramount. Family characteristics associated with academic achievement and intelligence can be divided into status variable such as socioeconomic status that though interesting, tell little about how their effects are mediated to the child and into process variables. For example, achievement press of parents home language model, academic home guidance, and social participation of family that are closer to being mediating variables (John B. Fotheringham, 1980).

A study made by Sam. M. Thornton and Burce (1967) show that, culturally disadvantaged children do not compete successfully with children from the middle class homes. Disadvantaged children generally demonstrate less potential for learning basic education skill and consequently achieve less academically. It is also recognized that total education includes enrichment of cultural experience, preparation for adult, family and community responsibility, and the development of mental and physical fitness. It is not clearly understood to what degree the school have been successful in modifying and broadening the experience of disadvantage children in these critical, non academic areas. The study

conducted by Betty Minor, indicated that the background information available for students from higher income families, where more successful in school and were highly motivated in school and after school than low achieving students. He further stated that, the family background variables to be examined includes a measure of socioeconomic status, religion, family size, birth order, parental marital status and mother employment status. Each of these variables are indices of the child's family background that many influence this scholastic achievement. Different in parents, occupational status contribute to differential achievement in at least two ways. a number of theorists have discussed the influence of family's social class position on the child's value structure and academic achievement. Although value structure and material advantage are not mutually exclusive factor contributing to the differential achievement performance, they both can be seen as possible influences on performance (Betty Miner 1967).

Other findings revealed that age, father/guardian social economic status and daily study hours significantly contribute the academic performance of graduate students (Ali, Shoukat, et al. 2013)

Today with tremendous mass of students being exposed to our educational system; we are deeply and sincerely concerned about the standard of our education. We are afraid that the level of learning is approaching mediocrity. In a desperate effort to blaster our standards, we become more strict in our marking system and we emphasize the test situation as a means of discouraging these student unable to compete. We see marks as an incentive to study and leaning. We feel that the student will work harder and learn better in order to obtain higher grades. We see marks as a method of rewards for the better student and as a means of " Realistic " evolution for all students. Unfortunately the relationship of

marks with ability and interest in leaning is not so simple. In fact there are a great number of influences affecting achievement that have no relationship at all t the ability and interest in leaning. there is some evidence that for many people, marks become a barrier to leaning and are seen more as punishment for poor achievement than as a reward for successful accomplishment.(Alexander 1979).

Factors contributing to poor performance include under staffing, inadequate teaching/ learning materials, lack of motivation and poor attitudes by both teachers and students, retrogressive practices (Zachariah .K et al.: 2012)

Thorne (1963) compared a low self acceptance group with a high self acceptance group after on induced failure situation. The low group raised their self evaluation in the task while the high group lowered their ratings. Those with low acceptance become so preoccupied with loss of self esteem that they could not make a realistic evaluation of their performance, which implies failure lead to defensive action. It is very important to see the difference between poor achievers and under achiever in this section. To see broadly the picture of poor achiever might be, putting this information together, a clear picture slowly emerges. The concept is the students own self perception. A student may be good or poor, depending on his pervious experience and environment success or failure operate on this self concept either to enhance or depreciate it. Generally speaking the poorer the early environment the greater the need for a good school experience and the more difficult it is to get one. Much of this depends on the pupil teacher relationship. Of course it is more difficult for the teacher to give poor ability student a good experience than to give one to a good student ( Scholnell,1962). Poor achievement in education is a problem in crating continuous and progressive development (Coronbach, 1954).

Ronald K.Parker (1968) proposed the only way in which he/she meet a situation lead on and try to achieve is if it enables his/her self esteem and does not give him feelings of failure. On other hand under achievement, it is claimed that many under achievers come from broken homes. Teachers often say that parents of under achievers either do not disipline him effectively or disagree over disipline. Children from homes like these may be emotionally upset and fail to adjust the school. (Mosley Nicholas, 1957).

Other study confirm the factors which were found to affect achievement: streaming effect, large class size, poor school facilities, the lack of preparation or homework, the lack of sound and efficient leadership in the school administration, the inadequate amount of time allocated to teaching and learning, and teacher characteristics. Moreover, other factors which affect achievement were environmental and social factors affecting achievement (Eshiwani, George S.2010). Generally, many researchers that the components of all the above indicated factors might influence negatively or positively the learner behavior in the school.

However, studies related to problems associated with poor academic achievement remain untouched and not clearly done. Thus, the intention in this research was to full fill the existing knowledge gap on problems associated with poor

academic achievement. The general objective of this research was to assess problems associated with poor academic achievement in Nekemete town, Oromia. More specifically, the specific objective of the study was to identify general problems of students related to poor achievement, to understand the main implications and consequences of poor achievement and to explore the environmental variables of the academically poor achievers that contribute to less/poor performance and finally to suggest solution in alleviating problem of the students for poor achievement.

## 2. Study Setting and Research Methods

This study was delimited to Nekemete town, East Wollega Zone, Oromia, particularly in Biftu Nekemete high school due to time constrain. The school has long experience of teaching and high concentration of poor academic achiever among high school in the town. The town is located at 327 km from the capital, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia. Nekemete (Naqamtee in Afan Oromo) is market town in western Ethiopia. Located in East Wellega zone of Oromia. Geographically, Nekemete town is located at 90° 33' latitude and longitude and 2,088 m above sea level. It is at the center of roads network for south western Ethiopia. The first major road dates back to early 1905, with a road that extended from capital Addis Ababa West through Addis Alem, although the road was passable only by lorries 225 kilometers between Addis Ababa and Nekemete is the largest city in Gutu Wayu Woreda.

Nekemete was the capital of former Wollega province and is home to museum of Wollega Oromo culture currently, she is capital of East Wollega zone, which is divided in to seven administrative weredas and hosting a total population of over 2 million residents. It has an agro – ecological setting of high lands (13%) midlands, (63%) and low lands (15%) (Ibid). The town has six subsidies for administrative purposes according to recent arrangements. Based on figures from central statistical Agency (CSA) in 2005 the Nekemete town has an estimated total population of 84,504 of whom 42, 121 were males and 42,382 were females. According to the 1994 Ethiopia population and housing census, the town had 47, 258 inhabitants. The town is the home of different ethnic groups .The major languages spoken are Afan Oromo (Oromo language) and Amharic. It also serves as the center where many religious group followers live together peacefully.

A descriptive study design was used in this study to describing people who take part in the study. The population from which the subject under study was taken from that of Biftu Nekemete high school. The school was previously named as the so called Meskerem 2. The school had a total of 2880 students and 72 teachers from which 86 of them were taken as a sample size.

The study used probability sampling techniques of which stratified sampling techniques to select the target population who were involved in the study. The technique was selected for its relevance to the population from which the sample was drawn. In order to obtain the subjects from different

grades (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>) a certain formula is needed. Therefore, the formula below was used.

$$ni = Ni * n / N$$

**Where:**

**ni** = sample size needed from each grade (50 from grade 9<sup>th</sup> and 36 from grade 10<sup>th</sup>)

**Ni** = population size of each grade (1674 for grade 9<sup>th</sup> and 1206 for grade 10<sup>th</sup>), **n** = total sample size (i.e 86), **N** = total population (i.e 2880)

The table below reveals how the sample was drawn and how much was taken from each grade.

Grade	Ni	ni
9 <sup>th</sup>	1674	50
10 <sup>th</sup>	1206	36
Total (N/n)	2880	86

Quantitative research approach was used to gather information using tools like questionnaire, interview and document analysis. Primary as well as secondary sources of data were used. The primary sources of data were the students and school teachers while secondary sources of data were document related to teaching and learning process. Study respondent were selected based on their academic achievement records (students) and experience of teaching (school teacher and directors) to the issue of inquiry. The sample size guided the number of the respondent. Data collection tools like questionnaire guide, interview guide and document analysis checklist were used.

Before the two key respondent (students and teachers) were filled and interviewed together with document analysis at their working places / school compound, pre test have been conducted by five selected students in order to ensure misunderstanding or error. 86 students filled questionnaire and five teachers and two school director (head and vice) interviewed.

The process of data collection was accompanied by data analyses using descriptive statistics. Since quantitative data are interpreted using statistical / numeric ways, percent, bar graph, pie chart and table were used to present the finding of the study. The data were analyzed based on thematic topics primarily developed from the study objective.

Support letter written by the department of Psychology was submitted to Nekemete town Biftu high school director office. The director in turn welcomed the researcher and provided necessary information related to study and also gave permission for facilitating the required data for the study. Each questionnaire lasted at least for half hour whereas individual interview schedule for each teachers and school directors was about an hour's. Moreover, document analysis were reviewed for more than two hours in the school directors office and concerned department. Afan Oromo language were used for data collection that encouraged the respondents to fulfill the questionnaire and expresses their view using their own words.

All respondent in the study have been requested to give oral consent after the explanation of the research objective, procedures and informed consent as well as the benefit and

possible risk were presented to them. As far as the issues of privacy and child sensitive matters were dealt with during data collection, the issues of confidentiality was critically taken into consideration. The subjects were informed that they could withdraw from the study any time or refuse answering for any question. Finally, their information were kept confidential.

### 3. Definition of Terms

There can be different meaning /definition for one concept according to different individual. thus it is difficult to find a universal definition of the terms. So most of the time terms seem to be defined on the basis of the research problem. In this study terms that was appear repeatedly are: poor achievement, underachievement and environmental conditions.

- **Poor achievement:** is academic achievement of students whose score fall below 59% semester average.
- **Under achievement:** occurs when a student's performance is below what is predict based on the student's ability and also explain in terms of different factors, like family, environment and psychological problems. In this case the students could achieve better in a better environmental situation.
- **Environmental condition:** In this study it means family and the surrounding.

### 4. Results

This section presents results of research theme by theme starting from the very general points about problems associated with poor academic achievement.

#### 1. General condition of students

- **Grades:-** Even though students who score below 50% are considered as failure according to the marking system of ministry of education and 60% of the subjects used were between 39-49 & average, the rest were 50-55%.
- **Age:-** The ages of students used were in the range of 15-21.
- **Sex:-** Most of the subjects used were female subjects primarily. Because male students in the school are very few and the few all could not serve the purpose of the study. Since most of them score above (60%) so (66.66%) of the subjects used were female and the rest (33.33%) were male subjects.
- **Educational background of the students:-** the respondents indicated that (65.33%) of them attended different schools. The others (34.66%) attended there schools.

#### 2. Family back ground

**Table 1:** Percentage of the level of education of parents of poor achieving students

Level of education	Parents			
	Father		Mather	
Elementary	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary	42	48.83%	60	69.76
	21	24.41%	12	13.95

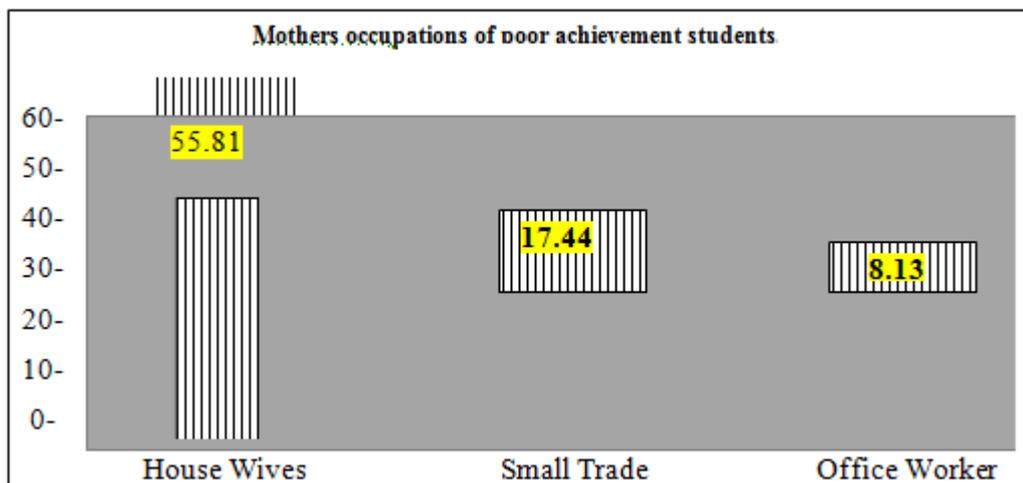
According to the findings as revealed on the table above, the educational status of the parents of the participants was categorized as in the following. 42(48.83%) of father's of students do not complete elementary school, 21(24.41%) attended secondary school. similarly quite a large number of

mother of students 60(69.76%) attended early class elementary school, 12(13.95%) attended secondary school or high school.



The above paragraph indicates the parental occupation of the respondents. Therefore, father of majority of the students 38(44.18) are engaged in simple labor, 11(12.79) of father of

students are pensioners and only 3(3.48%) of the father occupy fairly better job in the offices and the remaining 23(26.74%) include death, no job.



According to the above bar graph indicates, the majority of student mother 48(55.81%) Rare house wife, 15(17.44%) of mother's are engaged in very small retail trade and few of students mother's engaged in office worker that is 7(8.13%).

Size of Family	Frequency	Percentage
Large family	57	66.27
5-8 member	10	11.62
Below 5	8	9.3

**Table 2:** Percentage of level approximate income of parents of poor achieving students and size of family

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below 150 birr	60	69.79
200-300 birr	15	17.44
300 and above	-	-

As the above table indicate the majority of parents of poor achieving student's income approximately below 150 birr, that is 60(69.76%), the other gain small income i.e. 15(17.44%) where as the rest parent didn't have an income at all. Moreover to this, the size of parents of poor achieving student are large i.e. 57(66.27%), the other constitute between 5-8 member that is 10(11.62%) and the rest of family size is below 5 that is 8(9.30%).

**Table 3:** Percentage of (agreement) among parents and their attitude towards education of children

Agreement status	Frequency	%	Attitude of parent	Frequency	%
Slight agreement	38	44.18	Simply send to school	30	34.88
No agreement (some divorce)	27	31.39	Do not care	26	30.23
High agreement	10	11.62	Encouragement to some income fetching labor	19	22.09

According to this above table reflects there is a slight agreement of parents and their attitude toward education of children i.e. 38(44.18%), no agreement (some divorce) constitute 27 (31.39%) and the rest or small portions, there is high agreement among parents that is 10(11.62%). Further more to this, the majority of the parents simply send their children to school i.e. 30(30.25%) small number of the encourages their children to some income fetching labor i.e. 19(22.09%). Moreover, regarding to marital status of parents of poor achieving students, the majority of the participants are presently live with both parents, that is 58(67.44%), where as a small portion of the student live only with one parent i.e. 17(19.76%).

### 3. Environmental Conditions

**Table 4:** Percentage of environmental conditions of students of poor achievement

Environmental condition	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No motivation from parents and others	51	59.30
Attitude of surrounding towards education(no idea about it)	39	45.34
Discouraging	7	8.13

According to the findings as revealed on the table above regarding to social motivation the students are not motivate at large i.e. 51(59.30), the attitude of the surrounding toward education the student seem to have no idea about it. That is 39(45.34) and only 7(8.13%) responded that it is discouraging.

### 4. Companionship

Regarding to the selection of confidants of students, the above table shows 64(74.41%) of subjects selected their friends as their confidants in educational problem. The remaining 7(8.13%) student consult their teacher and some of them do not need confidants i.e. 4(4.65%).

With regard to peer group relation, they were asked if they occasionally meet for group study, 84% of them responded that they do not have this program. In selection of confidants (to share problem with) educational problem tended more frequently with school friends than school counselor, teachers, parents. According to the above table shows that 64(74.41%) of subjects selected their friends as their confidants in educational problems. Most of the students do not even know the fact that there is guidance and counseling service in the school. The remaining 7(8.13%) of the students consult their teachers and some of the do not need any confident i.e. 4(4.65%).

### 5. Out of school time activity

Points in relation to out of school time activities of poor achieving students shows 57(66.27%) of the student spend their time helping their parents at home. 12(13.95%) of them reported that they are working for pay and the rest of the students do not regularly attend sport and watching T.V. out

of school time activities i.e. 6(6.97%). It may due to in accessibility of the material.

With regard to out of school time activities a large number of subjects, table eight (8) indicates that (6.27%) of them spend their time helping their parents at home, 13.95 of them reported that they work for pay , the rest do not respond. With respect to sport, T.V. program, cinema almost all (92%) do not regularly attend as out of school activities. It may be due to inaccessibility of the material.

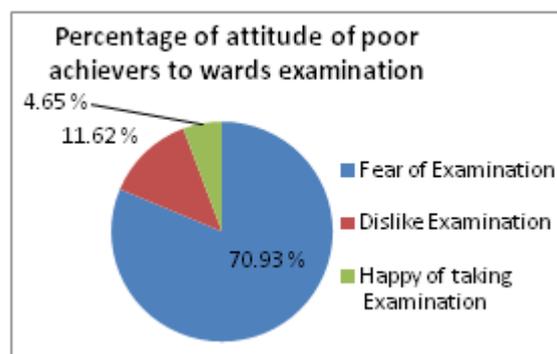
### 6. School/Teachers

This section part tried to analyze the responses of the teachers by large and that of students. A lot of students (80%) claimed that teachers do not pay attention to students who could not score the expected result in a test or class activity. With regard to teachers attitude toward poor achievers, most teachers do not seem to know why students, achieve poorly according to the above table shows 10(67%) responded that it is so because of students negligence, 5(33%) seem somewhat reasonable and said, "may be because we have a lot of students in one class that no one gets time to see individual cases closely," some said "may be these students are encountered with family problems and things of this sort".

### 7. Attitude of school administration

They said a lot about poor achieving students but the important one to be mentioned here is that, "students are not given proper guidance during their elementary school life so that they come to high school with un programmed style of study"

### 8. Psychological factor



Examination is one of them important factors to be taken under this subtitle according to the above table shows majority of the students (70.93%) of the subjects responded the fact that some sort of fear during examination, ( 11.62%) of them show a sort of dislike to examination, and only (4.65%) claimed that they feel happy of taking examinations.

**Table 5:** Percentage of students of poor achievement who experienced frustration

Conditions of students	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frustration because they are busy	24	27
Because of no close friend	23	26.74
Because of disagreement in the family	19	22.09

In response to fear producing situation quite a large number of them (76%) experienced fear in one way or other but the reason given do not show the existence of phobia, only (9.3%) responded which might be accounted of phobia, according to the above table indicates 27.90% of them get frustrated because they are busy at home throughout and 26.74% because they could not have intimate friends. Some of them 22.09% have reported that they are constantly in disagreement with their parents mainly because, the parents do not let them have free time for rest and date with friends. 31.39% reported some disagreement with their mothers due to different reasons. Though most of them reported some disagreement with their parents 94.66% of them responded that they have never splits from the parents.

### 9. Language

Initially the researcher had assumed that there might be problem of bilingualism which might affect achievement, but the findings (92%) provide that there is no problem of this, i.e. most of the speak Afan Oromo originally. The difficulty of English language being equal for all.

### 10. Maturity and Development

It is difficult to detect problems of this sort though application of questionnaire, so it is attempted to find indirectly by asking question as “ your choice of friend is ....?”, if most choice had been with younger children it might be concluded that their might be problem of immaturity, but most of them (86.66%) reported that they would like to have friends of similar age, the rest (13.33%) younger and elder friends.

### 5. Discussions

The fact that environmental characteristics home condition and neighborhood can facilitate or hinder the academic performance of students, the findings of this educational and occupational level of parents, lack of motivation, and feeling of worthlessness appear to be some of the main important environmental factors that affect achievement.

The educational level of most of the parents is too elementary and occupation wise also engaged in low paying physical labor, so that the parents do not seem to have enough time and academic back ground to discuss on educational matters with their children, McClelland (1961) conducted experiment regarding the relationship of child rearing practice to achievement in the home of forty families, twenty of which contained a son who scored very high in achievement. Finally the finding of the experiment indicated that both the mothers and fathers of the boys with achievement expected their son to perform above average and it also demonstrated that the parents of the son's with high achievement should a more loving and encouraging attitude toward their children while they were performing. From this finding one can infer that proper child rearing

practice and motivation has a tremendous contribution to achievement which in the case of the present study is not observed. as it is shown in the findings, most of the subjects do not get any sort of motivation either from parents or teachers.

From the findings of the some of the teachers themselves are not aware of what governs students achievement. For them poor achievement is associated with inefficiency or negligence of students. Generally they do not get themselves involved in searching for the enhancement of students achievement motivation. There is guidance and counseling offices in the school but most students are not aware of its existence and importance.

Teachers and school administration can play the most important role in achievement motivation of students. In educating and evaluating any method we must ask ourselves if that particular experience will enhance the students self concept. If it doesn't, we must improve or reject it. The same method can meet with success or failure, depending on the total situation in which it is applied. It is human interpersonal relationship between teacher and pupil that determines whether the method leads to a success of failure. If conditions such as an impossible home environment or rigid marking system act as obstacle, it will make it very difficult for teacher to give the pupil feeling of self esteem and success.

Motivation to achieve is investigated when an individual knows that he is responsible for the outcome of some venture, when success or failure, and when there is some degree of risk; i.e. some uncertainty about the outcome of his effort. The goal of achievement oriented activity is to succeed, to perform well in relation to a standard of excellence or in comparison with others who are competitors(McClelland 1961).

Out of school activities of the students are important indications of the conditions of high or poor achieving students, based on the finding of the research. Poor achieving students seem to pass their most of out of school time activities working simple labor of pay and helping their parents at home. This occupies most of their time which will not leave them sufficient time to study or participate in other activities like similarly study practices of the students are either the facilitating or inhibiting factors for achievement. The place of study, the amount of time on studying and the duration of study do matter in academic success. This study reflected that due to shortage of time and settled style of life, poor achieving students do not spend much time doing home work or studying. They don't even have time table and organized program for their activities.

The other important factor which needs to be emphasized is psychological problem. As it is shown in the previous section, majority of the students encountered with fear when taking examinations. May be due to the fact that they did not have enough time and plan for their educational activities. They might have created poor self concept of their inefficiency to compete with other students i.e. fear of failure. As it indicated by Alexander self concept and achievement interact with mutual effect, “poor achievement

leads to a depreciation of the self concept which lead to continued poor achievement; and to a lesser extent. Good achievement leads to an enhancement of the self concept which lead to better achievement” (Alexander 1998). On the other hand , frustration seems to be equally serious problem for students with poor achievements.

Every one occasionally in counters frustration and obstacle interfering with the achievement of a desired goal. From a research point of view, frustration is a situational variable ; reactions to it have in studied extensively both experimentally and in natural settings. One of the most common reactions is aggregation. Children subjected to experimentally produced frustrations are likely to react with aggressive responses specially if they are in a permissive situation where aggression is not likely to bring punishment.

The case of the present study regarding this point had also affected students in additional to other factors mentioned earlier. Finally, the whole idea of the findings of this study is that social and sociological impact of students as a tremendous effect on academic achievement.

## 6. Conclusions and Suggestive Way Outs

It becomes clear that mental abilities such as academic achievement are complex both in their nature and in their cause. Though limited, the present investigation, due to the size of the sample and distribution of subject, it may serve as indicator of some ideas regarding the issue of the problem of students for poor achievement. Since human behavior is so complex, poor academic achievement cannot be attributed to a few casual factors, at least with the measurement at hand. Student claim to be poor achieving in this study seem to have encountered with family, school, personal and psychological problems of one kind or another which really intervened in their academic advancement.

In achievement related context success may be attributed to high ability and/or effort, while failure is perceived as due to low ability and/or individual effort. The achievement oriented behavior of students includes many factors such as teacher behaviors (reward and punishment, student behavior (pride and shame) and others. It is reasonable to speculate the achievement strivings are in part determined by casual attributive and that individual differences in achieving needs are related systematically the disparities in the subject though (Weiner,1972).

Besides lack of parental guidance and encouragement, little or no idea of parents toward school, low educational level of parents and others have been found to be some of the major factors which accounted for the poor academic achievement in grades nine to ten of Biftu Nekemete high school. On other hand good motivation and encouragement plus parental follow up on children education is taken as a recommendation for future performance of children.

The students taken for this study purpose could be better and in better environment situation so that the care in question may not simply be concluded as being solely of poor achievement but also of a case of bright students under

achievement if proper test of appropriate type is used to measure the students ability.

The study recommends the fact that poor academic achievement may not be attributed to student alone. It is related with general system and progress of the country, mass basic literacy campaign and continuing education should be intensified so as to give broad ideas of the advantages of education to parents of the students. Moreover, school administration should pay attention to students having a social problem and provide them with the possible necessary assistance and prepare special program for problem student outside the formal class hours and allocate experienced instructor to help them solve their difficulties additionally, school guidance and counseling service should be established and/or reestablished in a desired level and size to publicize its advantage to students. The school teachers have to understand the need and interest of pupils to alleviate problem associated with poor achievement. To do this teacher should be planned to invite student involvement.

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