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Self-Actualization and Personal Growth Initiative among the Teachers of Adolescents

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A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates into the nature and degree of “Self-actualization” and “Personal growth initiative” among higher secondary school teachers. Of 128 faculties, 72 teachers were selected from private sector and the remaining 56 teachers were from aided/govt higher secondary schools of Trissur district in Kerala state by convenient sampling. Two scales namely Self-actualization index by Jones and Crandall and Personal growth initiative scale by Robitscheck were used for collecting data. Most of the teachers constituting the sample exhibited moderately high level of self-actualization and personal growth initiative. Data analysis revealed significant positive correlation between SAI and PGI values. Also, a significant correlation between the independent variables like “age” and “years in service” and the dependent variable “self-actualization” was observed. But, correlation of same with the dependent variable PGI was not significant. Single factor ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the means of SAI&PGI values for different age groups. Differences in terms of ‘type of school’ and ‘religion’ showed no impact on PGI and SAI values of teachers. At the same time, a significant difference between the means of PGI values of Math and English teachers was noticed. The paper, in an attempt to explore the rationale behind the topic of study, presents a theoretical analysis based on previous research findings in adolescent and educational psychology about the role of teachers in adolescent mental health scenario. Also, it gives a glimpse into the overlapping areas between the characteristics expected from an effective teacher and a self-actualized individual.

Keywords: Self-Actualization, Personal Growth Initiative, Adolescent Mental Health, Effective.

INTRODUCTION

It was Goldstein (2014) a German neurologist who coined the term “self-actualization”. Later Abraham Maslow gave a full-fledged expression for the concept with his list of characteristics of a self-actualized personality. Definition of “self-actualization” as actualization of full potential of an individual makes it more appealing to the noble profession of teaching. It seems, objective of teaching, if put concisely, “all round development of personality of students” and the concept of self-actualization as stated above, stem from the same fundamental drive of humanity to recognize and actualize its innate potential. The present study estimates self-actualization index and personal growth initiative of teaching personalities. While SAI measures

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more subjective characteristics the profession demands, PGI estimates cognitive and behavioral aspects of the same.

For a long time self-actualization was only a theoretical construct. Today scales have been developed to measure its index. Shostrom's Personality Orientation Inventory was the trailblazer in this venture (Shostrom, 1964). The latest is Jones and Crandall's Self-Actualization Index (SAI) (Jones & Crandall, 1986). As a quantitative measure, it is not merely an indicator of position of the individual in the pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Abraham H Maslow, 1989; Abraham Harold Maslow, 1943). Rather, this index is an objective measurement of growth of personality of the individual with respect to the criteria, evolved by Maslow through the meticulous observation of individuals who have accomplished the highest level of their potentiality in their lifetime. Maslow used an authentic and sound method in his study of self-actualization. Maslow in *Self-actualizing people: A study of Psychological Health* says that the persons he studied were Lincoln, Einstein, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, William James, Whitman, Thoreau, Beethoven and Freud (Bar-On, 2010; Kaufman, 2018; Abraham H Maslow, 1956).

Personal Growth Initiative is a construct introduced by Christine Robitschek who defines it as "Person's global inclination to intentionally improve one's self in different areas of his or her life. It is a skill set that every person carries into life experiences that influences each person to seek out opportunities for growth and to capitalize on these opportunities by engaging in intentional efforts to personally change and improve". Teaching as a profession has immense possibilities for personal growth not only for the teacher but his/her students as well, provided the teacher is the initiator for both.

The ultimate aim of all teaching process and all teacher-student interaction is to assist students in personal growth. In other words, a teacher is supposed to be a person who has high awareness of all cognitive and behavioral practices that are likely to lead to personal growth for a particular personality.

Moreover, it seems, no other profession is as volatile and transient in its structure as teaching is. A teacher has to update herself with new skills, attitudes, strategies continuously and reorient her mindset accordingly. In order to compete with rapidly changing socio-cultural demands due to globalization and ubiquitous culture of technology and evils of commercialism, it is imperative that a teacher should be a person committed to personal growth which never quits. Robitschek and Cook (1999) who developed Personal Growth Initiative Scale (PGIS) says that PGI is concerned with intentionality of growth, an individual's willingness to engage in the improvement of themselves or their lives (Robitschek & Cook, 1999). PGI propels people to continue seeking challenge and growth that can lead into achievement of life goal and personal fulfillment (Robitschek, 1998). These things substantiate rationale behind measuring Personal growth initiative among teaching faculties in order to ensure efficiency as well as effectiveness in their profession.

We hypothesized that there will be a significant correlation between PGI and SAI values of teaching faculties. Also our assumption was, age, years of service in teaching, school environment and teacher's religious affiliations etc will have considerable impact on SAI and PGI values. Despite the fact that, most of the characteristics of self-actualized individuals, as described by Maslow, coincide with the qualities of an effective teacher, there aren't any studies seriously dealt with the Self-actualization and Personal Growth Initiative among teaching faculties so far. This was a crucial observation made by us during extensive literature review.

ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH AND THEIR TEACHERS

Adolescence is a phase of development in which the struggle between autonomy and attachment to caregivers moves to center stage (Boykin McElhaney & Allen, 2001). The move from childhood into adolescence is a stressful transitional period (Cohen, 1999). Often, their social relationships including peers and teachers become a means of mitigating the pain of stress and strain peculiar to their stage of development. During transitional periods and times of stress, social relationships may take on particular significance, as they can buffer the effects of stressful life events (Eckenrode, 2013).

Feeling a connection and sense of relatedness to a teacher represents an essential need of all children and teens (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). During adolescence, a highly supportive relationship between teacher and student is connected with better outcomes in academics and behaviors (Demaray, Malecki, Rueger, Brown, & Summers, 2009; Ellonen, Kääriäinen, & Autio, 2008; Furlong, Gilman, & Huebner, 2009). There is significant connection between adolescent's feeling higher levels of support by teachers and feeling better about themselves (Demaray et al., 2009; Suldo & Fefer, 2013). Support and encouragement in a relationship with a teacher is also associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and behavior problems for adolescents (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder Jr, 2004; Ellonen et al., 2008).

Teachers are in a position to promote positive emotional health and possibly reduce the occurrence of anxiety among adolescents in several ways. There is growing evidence that perceptions of teacher support can affect student psychological well-being (Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990; Midgley & Edelin, 1998). Teacher-student relationship can serve as a protective factor against dangerous health behaviors such as smoking, getting drunk, marijuana use, suicidal ideation, weapon related violence (McNeely & Falci, 2004).

Thus a sizable literature provides evidence that strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of all students in schools (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999). All these findings keep on reiterating the fact that teacher student relationship if viewed and analyzed from different perspective has the potential to take a preventive role against many psychological aberrations adolescents are likely to be affected by. And the personality characteristics of a teacher is the basic platform upon which, quality of this teacher-student relationship flourishes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SAI AMONG TEACHING FACULTIES

Characteristics of a self-actualized personality, as described by Maslow, are, efficient perception of reality and comfortable relationship with it. Spontaneity, Problem centeredness, Detachment, Need for Privacy, Autonomy, Continued freshness of appreciation. Peak experiences, Geme in schaftsgefühl, deep interpersonal relationship, Democratic character. Discernment of means and ends. Sense of humor, Creativeness. These characteristics reveal a striking similarity with the personality characteristics and traits observed in an effective teacher. We are not in a position to find out a fixed set of characteristics in the personalities of teaching professionals that will promise effectiveness and excellence in their profession. But extensive search in electronic media helped us to sort out most agreed characteristics of a teacher personality. We collected information both from theoretical as well as empirical studies in this realm. In these studies variables and indicators used to assess personality or disposition of teacher were noted down to get a more vivid idea of dominant characteristics expected in an effective teacher personality. To cite two or three evidences, National Council For Accreditation Of Teacher Education NCATE provides following explanation of "disposition" of teachers:

“dispositions are the values, commitments and professional ethics that influence behavior towards students, families, colleagues and communities that affect student learning, motivation and development as well as educators own professional growth”(Education, 2008). Dispositions, according to the NCATE, are steered by attitudes and beliefs related to values like caring, honesty, fairness, empathy respectfulness, responsibility, and thoughtfulness. Arkansas State University developed Teacher Disposition in 2009. The traits listed are, 1)responsibility 2)dependability 3)creativity 4)empathy 5)professionalism 6)commitment to lifelong learning. National Association of Special Education Teachers NASET in the paper titled How Teacher Personality and Style Affects the Growth of Self Confidence gives a list of Positive Teaching Characteristics. They are Genuineness, Fairness, Organization, Logic and Common Sense, Ability to Set Clear Boundaries, Sense of Humor, Ability to Give Compliments, Ability to Admit Mistakes, Willingness to Listen, Approachability

After a detailed investigation for overlapping areas in a teacher personality and self-actualized personality in the previous research repository, the theoretical conclusion reached, in the context of present study, is that qualities and traits attributed to an effective teacher is a byproduct of his/her self-actualization. Our conclusion is NOT that index of self-actualization is a perfect criteria for determining effectiveness, efficiency or excellence of a teacher personality. SAI will not give any clue regarding skill or knowledge or leadership abilities of a teacher. But it will definitely provide a reliable measurement of strength of the substratum upon which skills and knowledge of a teacher are supposed to function for effectiveness and excellence in her profession. It will reveal degree of readiness as well as capacity of a teacher for professional actualization. It will expose his/her willingness to actualize goals which her/his profession demands as a mold of human personalities. Maslow's description of self-actualizing individuals warrants this view. Maslow describes self-actualizing people as being "devoted, working at something, something which is very precious to them - some calling or vocation in the old sense, the priestly sense(Abraham H Maslow, 1971).

Present study focused on the self-actualization among teaching personalities, and its distribution with respect to demographic variables like age, years of service, type of school, religious affiliation etc within the selected sample. Also we analyzed relationship of the same demographic variables with the personal growth initiative of faculties so that entire study will give a glimpse into the factors that are likely to optimize self-actualization and personal growth initiative among teaching faculties.

METHODOLOGY

The sample was selected from various higher secondary schools in Trissur by convenient sampling (N=128). Of these 56 faculties were from aided/govt sector and 72 were from private sector. Mean age of participants was 40.1.

The plan was to estimate the index of self-actualization and personal growth initiative and analyze its nature and distribution with respect to the teacher demographic variables such as age, type of school, years in service, religion and subject of teaching. Scales were distributed among the participants directly and the required data was collected. Both correlation test and t-test were used to get a clear picture of nature of variables. Single factor ANOVA was carried out to analyze the distribution of variables over different groups categorized according to their age.

A four point Likert scale for determining Self Actualization Index SAI by Jones and Crandall was administered to the selected group³. The short index of self-actualization 3.consists of 15 items. It has 12 day test-retest reliability of .69 ($p \leq .001$), with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .63 to .69. Validity studies have shown that short index of self-actualization has

significant correlation with Personal orientation inventory POI (Shostrom, 1964) ($r=.67$, $P\leq.001$). Maximum value of index is 60. Greater the value, higher the level of self-actualization.

Personal Growth Initiative among teachers was evaluated with the help of Personal Growth Initiative Scale PGIS by Robitschek6. This is a uni-dimensional scale consisting 9-item. It measures respondent’s personal growth initiative desire to be involved in changing and developing oneself as a human being. Respondents answer each item using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Studies confirm construct, convergent and discriminate validity of the PGIS. It has internal consistency ranging from .78 to .90 and test re-test reliability of .74.

RESULT

Significant correlation was obvious between SAI and PGI, SAI and Age and SAI and Years of service. (Table: 1). Single factor ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference between the means for SAI & PGI values over different age groups. (Tables: 3, 4). No significant difference of means was observed between Private& Aided school teachers in their SAI&PGI values (Table: 2). same was the case with the role of religious affiliation of teachers. Students’ t-test for teachers dealing arts and science subject yielded no significant difference in their means for SAI&PGI values except between Math and English teachers in their PGI values.

Table 1. Correlation table for SAI&PGI values over Age and Years in Service

	Mean	SD	SAI	PGI	Years of Service	Age
SAI	45.72	5.189	1			
PGIS	44.02	5.574	0.41**	1		
Years of Service	12.18	6.928	0.2**	0.006	1	
Age	40.1	8.13	0.225***	0.033	0.816	1

* $p<.00001$ ** $P<.05$ *** $p<.01$

Table 2. Difference between means for SAI&PGI values

SAI	Mean	SD	t-value	PGI	Mean	SD	t-value
Aide	45.762	5.602	0.1728	Aide	44.704	5.475	1.1875
Private	45.79	5.001		Private	43.514	5.602	
Hindu	46.639	4.715	1.898	Hindu	43.836	5.021	0.334
Christian	44.891	5.532		Christian	44.172	6.127	
Arts	46.296	5.197	1.585	Arts	44.563	5.288	1.237
Science	44.842	5.105		Science	43.327	5.901	
Math	45.84	3.609	1.711	Math	42.737	5.288	2.1*
English	48	4.582		English	46.074	5.9	

* $p<.05$

Table 3. Single factor ANOVA for SAI values over different age groups

Age level	Mean SAI	SD	Df	F-value	sig
24-34	42	4.86	3.124	5.835	0.001
34-44	46.28	4.97			
44-54	46.69	4.38			
54, above	48	6.3			

Table 4. Single factor ANOVA for PGI values over different age groups

Age level	Mean PGI	SD	Df	F-value	sig
24-34	41.83	5.86	3.124	2.682	0.05
34-44	45.06	5.17			
44-54	43.07	5.66			
54, above	45.75	5.44			

CONCLUSION

Data analysis reveals the exact nature and degree of self-actualization and level of personal growth initiative among higher secondary school teachers. The teacher personalities in the selected sample are above average in their Self-actualization Index (SAI) and Personal Growth Initiative (PGI). As (table: 1) reveals, mean value of SAI is 45.72 while maximum possible value is 60. Similarly that of PGI is 44.024 which has maximum possible value 54. Which means teaching group in general is highly self-actualized and very much committed to their personal growth.

Supporting our first hypothesis, there exists, extremely significant positive correlation between the index of SAI and PGI values. ($r = .41$) with ($P < .00001$). This seems to be ratifying Maslow's description of self-actualizing personality as an individual committed to personal growth. According to Maslow self-actualizing people: A study of Psychological Health, self-actualizing people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of. Abraham H Maslow (1956). Self-actualizing individuals exhibit the characteristic "autonomy" in their personality which means they depend for their own development and continued growth upon their own potentialities and latent resources. As one compares the definition of "personal growth initiative" given by Christine Robitschek as "Person's global inclination to intentionally improve one's self in different areas of his or her life" (Robitschek, 1998) with the characteristics like spontaneity, creativity, continued freshness of appreciation etc in the self-actualized individual as given by Maslow, the positive correlation between PGI, SAI seems to be proclaiming that, in a teacher personality intentionality for one's own personal growth and tendencies for self-actualization foster each other.

One thing that noticed in the analysis is that there exists a positive correlation between "age" and SAI ($r = .23$) with ($p < .01$) of teachers. Also the difference in SAI values for different age groups were also significant with $P < .001$ (Table: 3). which means life experience can contribute well in the actualization of one's potentialities. At the same time, the correlation between age and personal growth is not so significant, though it is positive. But, difference in PGI values for different age groups proved to be significant at $P = .05$. (Table: 4). In both, senior teachers excelled compared to those in other age groups. From these two observations, it seems that age is not a de-motivating factor for taking initiative in personal growth. Perhaps a large sample can reveal a more vivid picture.

There exists moderately high correlation between the teacher variable "years of service" and self-actualization index. ($p \leq .01$). This seems to be supporting the view that there are overlapping areas between teacher personality and self-actualized personality. At the same time correlation between years in service and PGI is not significant (though it is positive).

According to Robitschek personal growth can occur as a result of intentional and unintentional process, however, PGI is only concerned with intentional change (Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek & Cook, 1999). It is a measure of intentionality for one's own personal growth. It is something to be cultivated and sustained by conscious effort. Result shows that professional experience has nothing to do with such kind of willingness or readiness for growth.

Type of school has no effect in SAI and PGI of teachers as there does not exist any significant difference between the means as per t-test. The value is ($t = 1.728$) for SAI with ($P = .86$) and that for PGI is ($t = 1.187$) with ($P = .23$). Which means actualization of one's potentiality can be accomplished and the desire for personal growth can be sustained irrespective of the kind of environment one is in. Also, this may be due to the divine quality attributed to the noblest of all professions teaching in the Indian culture. Teachers in general feel committed irrespective of circumstances in which they are working. The previous result of positive

correlation between “years in service” and Self Actualization with ($P < .01$) seems to be reiterating this observation.

Similarly religion has no effect on SAI ($t = 1.8976$, $P = .06$) and PGI ($t = .3342$, $P = .74$) values. This seems to be revealing the transcending nature of innate positive potentialities of human beings. It grows and expands itself irrespective of divisions set by society and culture such as religion.

Though there doesn't exist any significant difference in the SAI ($t = 1.5851$, $P = .11$) and PGI ($t = 1.2370$, $P = .21$) values of arts and science teachers, there does exist a significant difference between the means of Math and English teachers in PGI with. ($t = 2.1065$, $P < .05$). Perhaps, nature of subject of teaching might have some influence in the cognitive and behavioral aspects in the personality of teachers which is the concern of PGI. Meanwhile, subject of teaching has nothing to do with a holistic dimension of development with which SAI is concerned.

On juxtaposing the results of theoretical and quantitative analysis of this study, it is clear that senior teachers, irrespective of their cast, subject of teaching or their religious affiliation are in a better position to be effective in their professional role and capable of ensuring a better school atmosphere for the adolescent group struggling with the stress and strain which is typical to their stage of development. Also, self-actualized teachers are the best contributors to adolescent mental health scenario as self-actualized teachers are more likely to ensure effectiveness in their profession.

Implications: In the field of research, a reliable tool for evaluating SAI and PGI particularly for teaching group is yet to be developed. How self-actualization can contribute to effectiveness in teaching is yet to be studied and analyzed in detail. Measuring the level of self-actualization and personal growth initiative of teachers before appointing them as the faculty of any educational institution will ensure the resourcefulness of teaching faculty of the institution. Well organized programs intended to improve personal growth initiative of teaching faculty should be arranged in educational institutions. Also, a nurturing environment conducive to foster self-actualization should be cultivated and maintained in educational institutions. All these things will necessarily contribute the mental health of student community, especially of adolescent group.

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