

DEVELOPMENT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ASSESSING THE STUDY PROBLEMS OF PAKISTANI HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Z. A. Ansari & Shaheen Chowdhri[#]

*National Institute of Psychology
Islamabad - Pakistan*

A questionnaire was developed to assess study problems of high school students in Pakistan. The thirty-item questionnaire dealing with teachers' assistance, understanding versus memorizing, examinations, time management, distraction, study methods and regularity was given to 216 high school students. The sample consisted of equal number of boys and girls belonging to grades 8 through 10. Two-thirds of the sample was urban while one-third was rural. The questionnaire was found to have moderately high level of alpha reliability (between .74 and .84 for various groups). Item-total correlations were also highly significant. High academic achievers indicated fewer problems as compared to low achievers. Urban children were found to have more study problems as compared to rural children, particularly in terms of contacts with teachers, examination anxiety, and time management.

An earlier research (Ansari, 1983) has shown that the study habits and attitudes of students are important variables which are closely related with the success of students in their academic work. This study was in line with the previous findings which show that non-cognitive variables play a significant role in determining the academic achievement of students (for a detailed review of literature see Ansari, 1983). The present investigation was undertaken in order to further modify and refine the questionnaire on study habits.

The questionnaire developed for assessing the study habits (Ansari, 1983) contained only twenty questions which gave a Study Habits score. Further use of this questionnaire in Islamabad on various groups of students along with a number of interviews and discussions with students and teachers showed that while the earlier questionnaire was quite useful for research purposes with groups of students, its usefulness

[#] We are grateful to Pervaiz Naeem Tariq, Syed Ashiq Ali Shah and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

for individual counseling of students could be enhanced with a better coverage of various areas of study problems. This became particularly important because when the Study Habits Questionnaire (Ansari, 1983) was developed the sample included only the urban school children. When this questionnaire was used with a different group of children including rural children a number of new study problems emerged which were not covered comprehensively in the previous questionnaire.

The new questionnaire thus developed also involved a change of approach. The earlier questionnaire was essentially based on the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes Questionnaire (Brown and Holtzman, 1967). The new questionnaire is based on the experiences of the authors in Pakistani schools including the rural schools. It is designed to focus more sharply on the problems of Pakistani students, has a simpler language and is expected to be more useful for teachers and counselors in helping the students.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As a part of Guidance and Counseling project of National Institute of Psychology, Urdu version of Study Habits and Attitude Questionnaire developed by the first author was extensively used on children within Islamabad and in the rural areas surrounding Islamabad. The second author, who spent more time on counseling the students, held detailed open-ended interviews with children to get an idea of the nature and salience of their study problems.

During this exercise, it was found that in some cases the language of items included in the earlier questionnaire was difficult or complex. Similarly, there were areas of students' problems which were quite important but were under-represented in terms of number of items.

It was, therefore, decided that a modified version of this questionnaire should be developed which should include items from the Study Habits questionnaire but incorporate the following changes as well:

1. The language should be as simple as possible;

2. The contents of the questionnaire should be made more relevant to the type of problems that students in Pakistani secondary schools have;
3. The questionnaire should be made more suitable for individual counseling by increasing the number of items and grouping them for quicker identification of problem area.

The Study Habits part of the earlier questionnaire consisted of 20 questions out of which 14 have been retained in the new questionnaire usually with some modifications. Sixteen new items have been added, thus having a questionnaire of thirty items. In order to distinguish this questionnaire from the old Study Habits Questionnaire, the new one was named Study Problems Questionnaire[#]. The new questionnaire retains the format of the old one: against each of the 30 statements a student indicates whether this is 'always so', or 'never so', on a five-point scale.

Since the present study grew out of the earlier work, it would be useful to compare the two questionnaires in detail. The differences between the earlier and the latter questionnaires are as follows:

1. **Seeking Teachers' Assistance:** Three items in the earlier questionnaire concerned the assistance that a student tries to get from the teacher. These items were revised and were made more clear in expression.
2. **Understanding versus Memorizing:** The earlier questionnaire contained only one question regarding this area. This question was modified to make it more clear and three new questions were added. This was done because rote memorization appears to be a major problem in Pakistani schools.
3. **Examinations:** Four statements relating to examinations were present in the earlier

[#] The Study Habits Questionnaire as well as the Study Problems Questionnaire are available in Urdu form from the National Institute of Psychology, P. O. Box 1511, Islamabad.

questionnaire. Three of them have been retained. However, they were reworded to make them simpler. One item of the original was dropped and a new item added.

4. Planning and time-management: There were only two questions regarding this area in the earlier questionnaire. Their wordings were improved. Three more questions were included. This decision was based on our experience that students often have these problems.
5. Internal and external distractors: Only two questions were included in the earlier questionnaire. One of them was dropped and four new ones were added.
6. Study methods: This part contained only two items in the earlier questionnaire, one of which was dropped. The other one was retained with minor changes and three more items were added.
7. Regularity & Perseverance, etc.: Three items were retained with minor modifications and two more items were added.

List of items classified into various problem categories is given in annexure A.

TRYOUT OF NEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Sample

The questionnaire was given to 216 students. Half of them boys and half girls. Two-thirds of the sample ($N = 144$) was taken from the urban areas and one-third ($N = 72$) from the rural areas. The urban sample was taken from F.G. Boys School No.6 and F. G. Girls High School No.1 in Islamabad. The rural sample was taken from the Federal Government Boys and Girls High Schools, Kaller Syyadan.

From each of the urban schools, 72 students were selected: 24 each from grades 8, 9 and 10. From each of the two rural schools, 36 students were selected: 12 each from grades 8,

9 and 10. The sample of each class was carefully selected to represent all levels of academic ability. A list of students was prepared showing their marks in the previous annual examination and one-third of sample was selected from amongst the children obtaining the highest marks, one-third with the lowest marks and one-third from the middle level.

Procedure

The questionnaire was given to the students during their class hours. The selected students were called out and were requested to participate in this research. They were told that this information was being collected for research purposes and that it was hoped to be useful for students like themselves. Since students are not used to such questionnaires, considerable time was spent on this reassurance.

Scoring

Since this questionnaire had a different orientation from the Study Habits Questionnaire, the scoring system was also changed. The Study Habits Questionnaire was scored positively so that a high score indicated desirable study habits. For the present questionnaire a negative system of scoring was used, in which a high score indicated undesirable study habits and more study problems.

Analysis

The test items were selected on the basis of content validity. They represented, in the opinion of the authors, a sample of the type of problems that students of urban and rural areas faced. In order to see if the items defined a homogeneous area of contents, scores of students on each item were correlated with the total score obtained by them (minus their score on that item).

RESULTS

Main Findings

The results of the two analyses indicate that the items can be said to be defining a homogeneous area of content. All item-total correlations are significant beyond .01 level. The

average item-total correlation was .33. Alpha coefficients (table 1) for various groups ranged between .74 and .82.

Table 1

Coefficients Alpha for Study Problems Questionnaire

Group	Alpha
Grade 8	.80
Grade 9	.78
Grade 10	.84
Boys	.81
Girls	.80
Rural	.74
Urban	.82

The dispersion of the scores is shown in figure 1 which indicates a more or less normal distribution. The mean score of the total sample ($N=216$) was 70.61 ($SD = 15.12$).

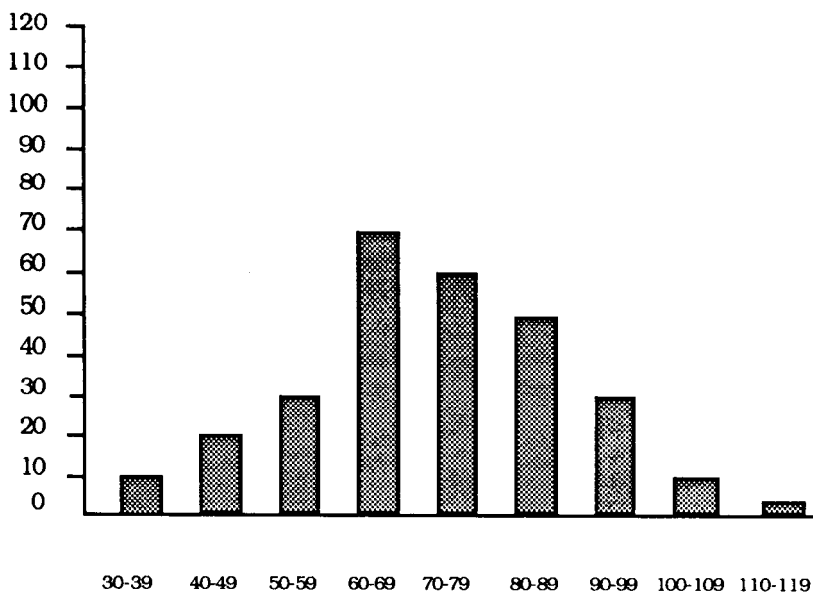


Figure 1: Study Problems Scores

Group Differences

Differences between scores of students belonging to various grades are not significant ($F=1.79$, $df=213,2$, $p>.05$). Similarly, gender differences are not significant ($F=1.4272$, $df=214, 1$, $p>.05$).

On the other hand, differences between urban and rural students are significant ($F=11.5067$, $df=214, 1$, $p<.008$). Urban children have reported more problems as compared to rural children. The differences are in the areas of: (i) seeking teachers' assistance, indicating that the rural students have closer contact with their teachers and are more likely to ask them for assistance as compared to urban students; (ii) planning and time management, showing that the rural students work in a more planned fashion, and (iii) anxiety regarding examinations, which was also found to be lower in case of rural children.

Another difference found to be highly significant between the groups of students was based on academic level ($F=9.0434$, $df=213,2$, $p<.002$). The high academic achievers were found to be significantly lower in terms of number of study problems as compared to those who fell in the low or middle academic achievers' category. The difference between the latter two groups was, however, not significant.

DISCUSSION

The Study Problems Questionnaire is meant to be used for individual counseling, rather than as a psychometric device for assessment of students. Therefore, the authors have tried to cover various aspects of study problems that emerged in their contact with high school students. Seven such aspects have been identified (annexure A) and a few questions have been included regarding each of these aspects. This questionnaire is expected to be particularly useful if it is used along with other tests, like those of achievement, to see if the student is not realizing his full potential due to study problems. It can also be given to large groups of students to identify common problems and provide group guidance; or as research instrument to find

out differences between various groups of students and impact of training programmes regarding study methods, etc.

REFERENCES

- Ansari, Z. A. (1983). *Study habits and attitudes of students: development and validation of a questionnaire*. Islamabad: National Institute of Psychology.
- Brown, W. F., & Holtzman, W. H. (1967). *Survey of study habits and attitudes*. New York: The Psychological Corporation.

Annexure 'A'

**CLASSIFICATION OF ITEMS IN TERMS OF
PROBLEM AREAS**

1. Seeking Teachers' Assistance: 2, 17, 23;
2. Understanding Versus Memorizing: 15, 18, 26, 28;
3. Examinations: 4, 19, 22, 24;
4. Planning and Time Management: 1, 10, 12, 29, 30;
5. Internal and External Distractors: 6, 8, 16, 21, 27;
6. Study Methods: 5, 7, 13, 14, 25;
7. Regularity and Perseverance: 3, 9, 11, 20.