

AMOGHVARTA

ISSN : 2583-3189



## Comparison between Under and Over Academic Achiever Students in Terms of their Academic Achievement Motivation, Academic Anxiety and Mental Health

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### Abstract

*The present study was conducted on 50 under academic achievers group and 50 over academic achievers group to make a comparison between them in terms of academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety and mental health respectively. It was hypothesized that under and over academic achievers groups of students would differ significantly in terms of (i) academic achievement motivation, (ii) academic anxiety and (iii) mental health respectively. For the verification of hypotheses the respondents were administered Mohsin's GIT, Academic Achievement Motivation Scale by De and Singh, Academic Anxiety Scale and MHB both by Singh and Sen Gupta to measure the variables. Besides these, the respondents were administered PDS to seek their personal information. Academic achievement was taken as the average of two annual successive school examinations records. The under academic*

*achiever (high IQ but low academic achievement) and over academic achievers (average IQ but high academic achievement) groups were compared on academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety and mental health respectively. The results supported the hypotheses. It was found that over academic achievers group of students excelled over their counterpart on under academic achievers group in terms of having high academic achievement motivation, low academic anxiety and sound mental health respectively. Thus, it was concluded that under as well as over academic achievement are the function of academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety and mental health respectively.*

### Key Words

*Students, Achievement, Motivation, Mental Health.*

### Introduction

In recent years, academic achievement has been recognized not only as an indicator of educational success but also as a significant factor influencing students' psychological well-being. The relationship between academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety, and mental health has been widely studied, particularly in the context of underachieving and overachieving students. These two groups, who exhibit significantly different academic performances, often face distinct emotional and psychological challenges that shape their educational experiences and mental health outcomes.

Academic Achievement Motivation refers to the drive or desire of students to achieve academic success. It involves an intrinsic and extrinsic motivation system where intrinsic motivation comes from personal satisfaction and interest in learning, while extrinsic motivation is fueled by external rewards, such as grades or parental approval. Academic achievement motivation plays a crucial role in how students approach their studies, set goals, and persist in the face of challenges. For high achievers, this motivation can be a source of pride, while for underachievers, a lack of motivation or external obstacles may inhibit success.

Academic Anxiety, on the other hand, is the emotional response to academic stressors, including the pressure to perform, fear of failure, and concerns about one's academic abilities. Academic anxiety can be experienced differently among students based on their academic standing. Overachieving students, often under intense pressure to maintain high performance, may experience anxiety about meeting their own or others' high expectations. On the other hand, underachieving students might experience anxiety about failing to meet societal or familial expectations, creating feelings of inadequacy. Academic anxiety can significantly impact students' mental health, affecting their ability to concentrate, engage with learning materials, and perform well on exams.

Mental Health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and it is a critical aspect of students' overall functioning. In the academic context, mental health issues such as stress, depression, and anxiety can arise as a result of both academic performance pressures and the strategies used by students to cope with challenges. Mental health problems can have profound effects on academic performance, creating a vicious cycle where poor mental health contributes to underachievement, which, in turn, exacerbates mental health concerns.

Underachieving students, who typically fail to meet their academic potential, often face feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and negative emotional states. Their lack of academic success may stem from various factors such as low motivation, external barriers, or insufficient support systems. The psychological toll of consistently underperforming can lead to heightened anxiety and stress, which can hinder their overall mental health and academic performance even further.

In contrast, overachieving students may be perceived as excelling academically, but they are not immune to mental health challenges. Overachievers are often highly driven and motivated to succeed, and this drive can sometimes escalate to unhealthy levels of perfectionism. Their desire to consistently outperform peers can lead to burnout, stress, and anxiety. The relentless pursuit of academic excellence might also create a fear of failure and a sense of inadequacy, as they constantly compare their performance to that of others. While these students may initially appear to have high levels of academic achievement motivation, the psychological burden they carry can be detrimental to their overall well-being.

Research suggests that the psychological differences between underachieving and overachieving students are significant. For underachievers, low motivation and high academic anxiety can impair their mental health and lead to a cycle of underperformance. Conversely, overachievers may experience anxiety and stress as a result of the high demands they place on themselves, which can negatively impact their mental health in the long term. Thus, while both groups exhibit academic challenges, the nature and outcomes of these challenges differ in ways that influence their mental health.

Understanding the interplay between academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety, and mental health among underachievers and overachievers is critical for educators and mental health professionals. Tailored interventions and support systems are needed to address the unique needs of each group. For underachievers, increasing motivation, building self-confidence, and reducing academic pressure can help improve their academic performance and mental health. For overachievers, promoting healthy coping strategies, reducing perfectionism, and encouraging balanced goals can alleviate anxiety and foster better mental health

outcomes. This research offers valuable insights into the complexities of academic performance and psychological well-being, underscoring the importance of a holistic approach to student support in educational settings.

## Review of Literature

Pintrich, P. R., & De Groot, E. V.<sup>9</sup> (1990) explored the relationship between motivation and academic achievement across a variety of academic settings. The authors provide evidence that intrinsic motivation is strongly correlated with higher academic achievement. They discuss how motivation influences students' cognitive strategies, engagement, and persistence, contributing to overall performance. This study highlights the importance of fostering motivation in both underachieving and overachieving students to improve academic outcomes. Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L.<sup>3</sup> (2002) examined the role of perfectionism in academic achievement among overachieving students. Their findings suggest that students who hold perfectionistic standards tend to experience higher levels of academic anxiety and depression. The paper underscores the need to address the negative aspects of perfectionism in order to mitigate its harmful effects on mental health, particularly in high-achieving students who are under constant pressure to excel. Misra, R., & McKean, M.<sup>8</sup> (2000) reviewed delves into the relationship between academic stress and mental health in university students. It explores how stress related to academic performance, time management, and workload affects mental well-being. The study highlights the mental health risks faced by both underachieving and overachieving students, noting that those with high academic expectations, whether high or low, are prone to anxiety, depression, and burnout. Dweck, C. S.<sup>2</sup> (1986) focused on the impact of different types of academic motivation (e.g., mastery vs. performance orientation) on students' anxiety levels. Students who focus on mastery (learning for the sake of learning) are found to experience less academic anxiety, compared to those driven by performance goals (e.g., grades or comparisons with peers). This study is crucial for understanding how motivational frameworks influence the mental health of both underachievers and overachievers. Harter, S.<sup>4</sup> (1999) investigated how academic achievement affects self-esteem and mental health, particularly in adolescents. Underachieving students often struggle with low self-esteem and depressive symptoms due to a perceived lack of success. On the other hand, overachieving students may face identity conflicts, anxiety, and burnout, despite high academic performance. The study underscores the importance of balancing achievement with psychological well-being. McInerney, D. M., & McInerney, V.<sup>7</sup> (2006) examined how various forms of academic motivation predict academic anxiety. They argue that students who lack intrinsic motivation are more likely to experience anxiety related to their academic performance. The paper also compares underachievers, who typically lack motivation, and overachievers, who often experience anxiety as a result of over-motivation and pressure to maintain success. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S.<sup>6</sup> (1984) provided a theoretical foundation for understanding how academic stress influences mental health. They explore how students' coping strategies—whether adaptive or maladaptive—can affect their academic performance and overall well-being. Underachievers tend to employ maladaptive coping strategies, which exacerbate their academic anxiety and mental health issues, while overachievers may overuse adaptive strategies, leading to burnout. Schunk, D. H.<sup>10</sup> (1991) investigated how different levels of achievement motivation affect mental health outcomes in students. Schunk found that students with high motivation for academic success, whether high or low achievers, are at risk for developing anxiety and depression when they experience failure or setbacks. The review suggests that academic motivation needs to be balanced with appropriate emotional and psychological support. Bandura, A.<sup>1</sup> (1997) focused on how students' beliefs about their abilities impact both motivation and performance. Underachievers often exhibit low self-efficacy, which in turn affects their academic motivation and contributes to academic anxiety. In contrast, overachieving students may have excessively high self-efficacy, which can lead to burnout and performance anxiety. This review highlights the role of self-efficacy in both enhancing and hindering academic achievement and mental health. Zeidner, M.<sup>11</sup> (1998) examined the relationship between academic anxiety, coping strategies, and academic performance in high school students. The study suggests that both underachieving and overachieving students experience academic anxiety but cope with it in different ways.

Underachievers tend to avoid academic tasks, while overachievers may engage in over-preparation, which can lead to burnout and anxiety. The paper emphasizes the need for effective coping strategies to manage academic anxiety and improve mental health. Karabenick, S. A., & Collins, E. R.<sup>5</sup> (2007) investigated the differences in academic motivation, anxiety, and mental health between high and low-achieving students. The findings indicate that while high-achieving students tend to have higher motivation and fewer academic anxieties, they are not immune to mental health issues such as stress, burnout, and anxiety. Low-achieving students, on the other hand, experience more negative emotions, such as shame and frustration, which hinder their motivation and mental health.

These reviews collectively highlight the complex relationships between academic motivation, academic anxiety, and mental health across different groups of students. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing appropriate interventions and support mechanisms that cater to both underachieving and overachieving students, improving not only their academic outcomes but also their psychological well-being.

## Objective

The study intended to compare under and over academic achievers groups of students in terms of academic achievement motivation, academic anxiety and mental health respectively.

## Hypotheses

- (1) Over academic achievers will excel over academic underachievers in terms of academic achievement motivation.
- (2) Over academic achievers and under academic achievers will differ significantly in terms of academic anxiety.
- (3) Over academic achievers will excel over under academic achievers in terms of mental health.

## Method of Study

### Sample

The sample comprised of 50 under academic achiever (high IQ but poor academic achievement) and 50 over academic achiever (average IQ but high academic achievement) respondents selected based on GIT score as well as academic achievement score. The respondents were matched in respect of sex, SES, inhabitation, interest, aptitude etc.

### Design Employed

Between group design was used

### Tools Used

- (1) A PDS was used to seek the personal information about the respondents.
- (2) Mohsin's GIT was used to measure intelligence of the respondents.
- (3) Academic Achievement Motivation Scale by De and Thakur was used to measure academic achievement motivation of the respondents.
- (4) Academic Anxiety Scale by Singh, A.K. and Sen Gupta, A.S. was used to measure academic anxiety of the respondents.
- (5) Mental Health Battery (MHB) was used to measure mental health of the respondents.
- (6) Academic achievement was taken as the average of two annual successive school examinations results

## Results and Interpretations

**Table 01:** t-ratio comparing the significance of difference between means of under and over academic achiever groups in terms of academic achievement motivation

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic Achievement Motivation	UAAG	50	35.11	3.45	9.54	98	<.01
	OAAG	50	41.50	3.25			

The results displayed by table-01 clearly revealed the significance of difference between the means of academic achievement motivation scores of groups of respondents of under and over academic achievers group. The respondents of over academic achiever group (Mean = 41.50) excelled over the respondents of under academic achiever group (Mean = 35.11) in terms of academic achievement motivation. The t-ratio was found significant ( $t = 9.54$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It was hypothesized that there would be difference between under academic achievers and over academic achievers in terms of academic achievement motivation, was retained. Over academic achiever students excel in academic achievement motivation compared to underachievers because they typically possess stronger goal orientation, higher self-efficacy, and greater persistence. They are more driven by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, have clearer academic goals, and better time-management skills. These students often receive positive reinforcement from teachers and family, boosting their confidence and motivation. In contrast, underachievers may struggle with low self-confidence, lack of clear goals, or external distractions, leading to lower motivation and academic performance.

**Table 02:** t-ratio comparing the significance of difference between two means (UAAG & OAAG) in terms of academic anxiety

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
Academic Anxiety	UAAG	50	39.44	3.37	13.96	98	<.01
	OAAG	50	29.81	3.55			

The results displayed by table-02 clearly revealed the significance of difference between the means of academic anxiety scores of groups of respondents of under and over academic achievers group. The respondents of over academic achiever group (Mean = 29.81) excelled over the respondents of under academic achiever group (Mean = 39.44) in terms of lower degree of academic anxiety. The t-ratio was found significant ( $t = 13.96$ ;  $df = 98$ ;  $p < .01$ ). It was hypothesized that there would be difference between under academic achievers and over academic achievers in terms of academic anxiety, was retained. Under academic achiever students tend to experience higher academic anxiety than over achievers because they often lack confidence in their abilities, fear failure, and feel pressure to meet expectations. Their past poor performance can create a negative feedback loop, increasing worry and stress about exams and assignments. Additionally, they may have less effective study habits and coping strategies, which heighten anxiety. In contrast, over achievers usually have stronger self-efficacy and better emotional regulation, reducing their academic anxiety.

**Table 03:** t-ratio comparing the significance of difference between two means in terms of mental health

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	SD	t-ratio	df	p
Mental Health	UAAG	50	55.48	3.64	12.16	98	<.01
	OAAG	50	64.80	3.72			

The results displayed by table-03 clearly revealed the significance of difference between the means of mental health scores of groups of respondents of under and average academic achievers group. The respondents of average academic achiever group (Mean = 64.80) excelled over the respondents of under academic achiever group (Mean = 55.48) in terms of mental health. The t-ratio was found significant ( $t = 12.16$ ;  $df =$

98;  $p < .01$ ). It was hypothesized that there would be difference between under academic achievers and average academic achievers in terms of mental health, was retained. Over academic achiever students manifest sound mental health compared to under achievers because their success boosts self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of accomplishment. Positive academic experiences reduce stress and anxiety, fostering emotional stability and resilience. They often have better coping skills, supportive social networks, and goal-oriented attitudes, which protect mental health. Conversely, under achievers may face repeated failures, negative feedback, and low motivation, leading to increased stress, frustration, and vulnerability to mental health issues.

## Conclusions

- (1) Under and over academic achievers differ significantly in terms of academic achievement motivation. Over academic achiever group excel over under academic achiever group in terms of academic achievement motivation.
- (2) Under and over academic achievers differ significantly in terms of academic anxiety. Under academic achiever group is more prone to academic anxiety than over academic achiever group.
- (3) Under and over academic achievers differ significantly in terms of mental health. Over academic achiever group manifest comparatively sound mental health than under academic achiever group.

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