

Helping the underachievers among students



Students' achievements in school are also influenced by the support or lack of it from parents and home environment.

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JUST as no two things are exactly the same, so is the aptitude for study different from one to the next person.

Teachers have to deal with different levels of learning ability and attitude towards studying every day in schools and educational institutions.

Some students are precocious with an early passion for learning, reinforced by the desire to take their academic pursuits to the highest level, while others are not as bright and sharp or are slow to learn or just not academically inclined.

Students' learning difficulties can be indicated by the presence of specific problems in achieving preferable learning results. These may involve psychological, sociological, and physiological factors, which can lead to irregular learning

achievements.

In their research on the underachievement phenomenon among students, Dr Chan Siaw Leng, a senior lecturer and a registered counsellor, and Joyce Morris Kapong, a senior language instructor at Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu Sarawak Campus (UPMKB), came up with a few recommendations to deal with this group of students.

They emphasised the need to understand several aspects of educational psychology such as the characteristics of the underachieving student, the factors causing underachievement, and how to help the underachiever.

The emergence of a student underachievement, they noted, is based on several significant factors such as the home and school environment, culture, and personality.

Interestingly, Albert

Einstein in his youth was perceived to be an underachiever by his school.

Chan and Joyce believe understanding the phenomenon of student underachievement through educational psychology would eventually benefit not only the students, teachers, and school counsellors, but also parents in addressing related issues and formulating effective ways to support the students.

According to them, identifying underachievement is closely linked to recognising potential and learning outcomes.

There are two categories of underachievement.

First, the situational underachievement in which underachievement occasionally occurs when the student gets into trouble at home or with the teacher.

Second is chronic underachievement whereby the student experiences continuous

underachievement for at least a year.

Evident traits

Several traits are evident in the underachiever, the primary one being a sense of low self-esteem while avoidance behaviour and tertiary-effective learning behaviour characteristics are the secondary ones.

The primary characteristic emerges when teachers and parents expect the student to perform well in school. However, as he lacks trust in himself, even though he can succeed, he dares not express his thoughts and feelings.

The secondary characteristic emerges when a student who objects to being called incapable and is yet reluctant to do anything about it, thinks there is no point in making amends.

The student believes the results cannot be maximised and avoids hard work, believing that learning is pointless and mostly blaming the school for his own poor attitude.

Generally, students in this group are perceived as lazy.

Chan and Joyce noted that in the case of tertiary characteristic, the underachieving student would try to cover his low self-esteem by influencing others, resulting in negative behaviours such as lack of motivation to learn, inability to concentrate during a learning process, and interference with or attempt at mocking friends with high learning motivation.

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It’s also important to highlight that not every student displays the characteristics of underachievement. If they did, it would be just one of the characteristics. On the other hand, it is possible underachieving students may display all the above characteristics. These students differ from most students in terms of motivation as they are less driven to be successful in school.

— Recommendations from Dr Chan Siaw Leng, and Joyce Morris Kapong



The school and the community can provide various opportunities to learn.