

The Effect of Hopelessness and Its Improvisation through Skill Acquisition among Gap Year Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore the factors behind the level of hopelessness among students in Pakistan. It was hypothesized that skill acquisition affects the level of hopelessness among students going through an academic gap year. The participants of this study comprised 300 (m=44, f=256) aged 15-30 years from Karachi, Pakistan. They were approached through a purposive convenient sampling technique. Adult Hope Scale (AHS) was assessed on the participants to assess their level of hopelessness where the duration of gap years, type of gap years, number of skills, and type of skills were noticed through the demographic form. The statistical analysis showed a significant interaction effect between skill acquisition and hopelessness of the students going through gap year(s). Therefore, the results of the study put forth skill acquisition as the positive factor that can be used to reduce the level of hopelessness among gap year students.

Keywords: Hopelessness; Gap years; Skill acquisition; Factors of hopelessness; Coping with the level of hopelessness

INTRODUCTION

Hopelessness refers to negative thoughts that lead to pessimist expectations about the upcoming future. It is a strongly held belief that poses as if the future is full of adversities and there is nothing that can save them from that. Individuals who have gone through a realm of hopelessness believe that there is a pattern of misery in their lives that they cannot solve. Such people lack the element of hope in their thinking. They become fixated on a negative event in their life and think as if this cannot be changed and no future positive event will ever be presented to them [1].

The term hopelessness is often associated with students taking a gap year. While observing gap year students, researchers found out that the teachers often teach students below their grade level and do not challenge them enough which can prove to be an obstacle to their growth. When students feel like their needs are not being catered to, they feel confused about their academic careers and may have to switch their grades. This may be a possible reason for students taking a gap year and not aligning their choices according to an already-built system [2].

To explore more elements of reducing hopelessness, Irving, et al. [3], carried out a study to investigate if finding meaning could reduce the level of hopelessness among individuals. The results showed that when people were indulged in some kind of work,

they thought better of themselves in general. They feel as if they are contributing to society and doing something good in their lives. Both the internal focus and external focus were affected by the participants when they were indulged in meaningful work. The elements that were found to be affecting the decision of the individuals were rewards, self-improvement, social, and moral variables. People like it more when they are receiving some kind of monetary value as a result of their work which also provides them with a sense of autonomy. They also wish to improve themselves and add some value to their lives by indulging in meaningful activities. The external focus tapped out social and moral aspects that were explained by the participants in both abstract and concrete terms. The participants felt good that they are doing some good in society and can prove to be valuable assets to the world around them.

Here comes the theory of skill acquisition which sees how an individual progress towards learning through the kinds of skills he earns. Here, skills are considered to be both, cognitive and psychomotor [4]. Active participation and rewarding skill acquisition have been noticed as two of the components that empower individuals and enhance the meaningfulness of their work [5]. In this case, the component of skill acquisition is very important as it also establishes and improves the standard of the environment of a place, whether it is a school or an organization

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[6]. As can be observed, hopelessness is a multidimensional component that is affected by several elements. To evaluate this variable, several composites must be noticed to establish a viable link. Subsequently, it can be noticed that hopelessness is a factor that is largely influenced by the environment one is in and the element that can be used in improving those surroundings can be skill acquisition. Hence, it can be said that the level of hopelessness one has can be significantly improved through skill acquisition.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The current research is based on a quantitative descriptive research design. Students going through a gap year were taken as a sample study and were accessed through the adult hopelessness scale.

Participants: The participants of this study comprised 300 students aged 15-30 year male and female both of which were selected through random convenient sampling. All of the participants were going through an academic gap year where several of them had acquired some type of skill during their transitional period. The students who were not going through a gap year and were not in the age range of 15-30 years were excluded from the study.

The following measures were included in the study

Informed consent form: An informed consent form was used to take consent from the participants to participate in the study. It was signed by the parents of the participants that were under the age of 18. The form included all the necessary information related to the research and introduced the participants to its nature of it. Additionally, they were also informed about their right to withdraw and the confidentiality of their data. The participants signed the form to express their willingness to participate.

Demographic information form: Basic demographic information of participants was taken through the demographic information form for which they were ensured of the confidentiality of their data. They were asked to fill in the information related to their age, gender, birth order, family system, the discipline of their education, educational level, number of skills, type of skills, credentials of the skills, the job market of the profession, career plans, reason for the gap year and duration of the gap year.

Adult Hope Scale (AHS): Snyder's cognitive model was employed in the development of the adult hope scale that explains hope as a positive motivational state that is comprised of two subscales that are, agency and pathway. The scale includes 12 items and 4 items are fillers. The other 4 items measure the agency subscale whereas the other 1 measures the pathway subscale. The response set of the scale comprises an 8-point Likert scale where the participants range their answers from definitely false to true [7]. The scale has excellent reliability of internal consistency and validity of concurrent and divergent validity and can be used with participants aged 15 and above [8].

Procedure

The participants were approached by snowball purposive sampling, where they were asked to fill out the form if they fit the criteria. A sample size of 300, consisting of both males and females, was selected where only the individuals who were going through a gap year and fell in the age range of 15-30 years were chosen. The research was initiated by first seeking permission from the participants which was followed up by a demographic form. In the last section, they were presented with the adult hope scale that accessed the level of hopelessness among these students.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) tool version 22. Descriptive statistics of the data were calculated and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied.

Table 1 represents the demographic information of the participants in the present study. Out of 300 participants, 258 (85.3%) were female while 44 (14.7%) were male. The majority of the participants fell under the age group of 20-24 (52.3%), while 42% fell under the 25-30 age bracket and the rest (5.5%) were in the 15-20 age bracket. Most of these participants had completed their bachelor's degree (56.0%), while 26.7% had completed their Master's degree and 17% were done with their intermediate. Only one student was at the Matric level of education. 73.7% of students reported having gained certification through their gap year, while 9.7% gained a diploma and 16.7% gained other forms of skill acquisition. 42% belonged to the science discipline, 29.7% came from social sciences, 15.3% from management sciences, and 13% to arts. 44.7% perceived the job market to be growing (47.7%), 26.7% perceived it to be stable, and 25.7% believed that it was unstable.

Table 1: Demographic information of gap year students (n=300)

Variables	Frequency (f)	%
Gender		
Male	44	14.7
Female	258	85.3
Age		
15-20	17	5.5
20-24	157	52.3
25-30	126	42
Highest level of education		
Matric	1	0.3
Intermediate	51	17
Bachelors	168	56
Masters	80	26.7
Discipline		
Science	126	42
Arts	39	13
Social sciences	89	29.7
Management sciences	46	15.3
Credentials		
Certification	221	73.7
Diploma	29	9.7
Others	50	16.7
Job Market		
Stable	80	26.7
Unstable	77	25.7
Growing	143	47.7

Table 2 shows the reliability of the scale and the subscales. It shows that all of these scales have good internal consistency.

Table 2: Cronbach alpha of the scale and the subscales

Scales	Internal consistency (α)
AHS	0.776
Agency	0.885
Pathway	0.848

Note: Adult Hope Scale=AHS

The total score for both the agency scale and pathway scale was 48 where the participants scored 23.08 and 23.55 respectively. Table 3 shows that the participants had a moderate level of perceived agency and pathways.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the subscales of the adult hope scale

Scales	Mean	Std. deviation
Agency scale	23.0833	5.53702
Pathway scale	23.5567	5.00837

Table 4 shows that most of the students (n=199) did not take a gap year, while a smaller number of students reported taking a gap year (59 for 2.00 years, 18 for 3.00 years, 12 for 4.00 years, 6 for 5.00 years, and 6 for 5.00+ years). Out of the 300 students, 185 took a planned gap year whereas, 115 students took an unplanned gap year. The majority of students (n=79) reported acquiring 4 skills during their gap year while 69 students reported acquiring 3 skills. A smaller number of participants reported having 1, 2 and 5+ skills. Most of them (n=158) acquired field-related skills, while 109 students acquired general skills. The rest acquired grooming-related (n=30) skills and 3 of the students learned some other skill.

Table 4: Number and type of gap years and skill acquisition

Gap year	n
1.00	199
2.00	59
3.00	18
4.00	12
5.00	6
5.00+	6
Planned	185
Unplanned	115
Number of skills	N
1.00	12
2.00	42
3.00	69
4.00	79
5.00	36
5.00+	59
Type of skill	N
General	109
Field related	158
Grooming related	30
Others	03

Table 5 shows a two-way analysis (ANOVA). It shows the effect of the variables involved in the study where the effect of a number of skills shows a significant effect on gap years.

Table 5: Relationship between hopelessness and type and the number of gap years and skills

Scales	Degree of freedom (df)	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Frequency (f)	Significance
Gap years	5	130.464	1.649	0.149
Type of gap years	1	42.097	0.532	0.467
Number of skills	6	241.706	3.055	0.007
Type of skills	3	14.541	0.184	0.907

Note: Coefficient of determination (R^2)=0.131

Table 6 shows a two-way analysis (ANOVA). It indicates that neither the hope scale nor the number of skills has a significant with gap year specifically, but they both have a significant relationship with each other.

Table 6: Relationship between the hope scale and the number of skills

Variables	Degree of freedom (df)	Coefficient of determination (R^2)	Frequency (f)	Significance
Hope scale	48	1.38	1.31	0.115
Number of skills	6	1.805	1.714	0.122
Hope scale × Number of skills	105	1.347	1.28	0.086

Note: Coefficient of determination (R^2)=0.151

Above is a post hoc analysis that shows the relationship between gap years and with number of skills. No significant effect was found in Table 7.

Table 7: Relationship between gap years and the number of skills

Number of skills	Age and skills (i-j)	Mean deviation	Std. deviation	Significance
1	Gap years>Number of skills	0.0476	0.33589	1.000
2	Gap years>Number of skills	-0.0072	0.32095	1.000
3	Gap years>Number of skills	0.4662	0.31793	0.754
4	Gap years>Number of skills	0.2778	0.34205	0.983
5	Gap years>Number of skills	0.274	0.32495	0.980
5+	Gap years>Number of skills	0.1667	0.66237	1.000

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to find out the determinants behind hopelessness. Skill acquisition was taken as an independent variable where hopelessness was used as a dependent variable and gap year was used as a descriptive variable. The mental health of students is severely deteriorated due to their hopelessness which can also lead to suicide. Hence, it is quite necessary to understand the factors of hopelessness among students [9]. For this reason,

the present research formulated the following hypothesis to find out the reason behind hopelessness among students: Skill acquisition affects the level of hopelessness among students going through an academic gap year. Adult Hope Scale (AHS) was used to evaluate the level of hopelessness among students ($n=300$) which found a significant effect ($R^2=0.131$) among the variables chosen. It shows that the variables have a strong relationship with each other whereas gap years have a negative relationship with hopelessness and skill acquisition has a positive effect on the variable. The findings of this research are affirmed by the previous research where they said that the type of environment has a major effect on the level of hopelessness of people [10]. Here, the two environmental factors are found to be gap years and skill acquisition.

The students were surveyed about their evaluations on the agency and pathway subscales of the adult hopelessness scale to assess their perceived power and pathway. They were also asked about the number and type of gap years and the skills acquired during those gap years to notice its effect on hopelessness. It showed that the number of skills attained by the student during the gap year has a significant effect (0.007) on their level of hopelessness. Williams, et al. [11], also conducted research based on skills and hopelessness among high school students and found a strong relationship between the both as gaining skills allows the students to regulate their energy in a healthier way which helps to decrease the hopelessness.

Similarly, the hope scale and the number of skills also showed to have a strong relationship (0.086) with each other. Hope proves to have a direct relationship with skills. Just like how the increasing number of skills increases hope, increased hope also helps individuals to use those skills more as shown in a study done by KhalediSardashti, et al. [12]. However, there was no significant relationship between number of gap years and number of skills which indicates that the number of gap years does not determine how many skills a student can learn. Overall, it proves the hypothesis and shows that hopelessness decreases as the student learns different skills in their gap year.

For a more comprehensive analysis, participants were queried about additional variables, including their education level, field of study, obtained credentials, and job market outlook. A significant majority (56%) held a bachelor's degree as their highest educational attainment, with a negligible percentage (0.1%) having matriculation. When exploring the reasons behind taking a gap year, the majority (42%) cited a science-related discipline, often linked to their pursuit of admission into competitive medical programs.

In Pakistan, many students opt for a gap year as they endeavour to secure a spot in a highly competitive medical program, which is increasingly challenging. Moreover, a noteworthy proportion of participants expressed optimism regarding the growth of their job market, aligning with the current situation in Pakistan. Despite ongoing instability in the country, there's a prevailing sense of hope for improvement.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

The current study included participants through purposive convenient sampling that may not be representative of the whole population accurately. Moreover, the present study included only 44 males out of 300 participants which shows it did not have an

equal distribution of participants. Another study that will focus on more efficient sample collection methods is recommended for the results to be generalized.

CONCLUSION

The research article presents literature related to hopelessness and shows how the level of hopelessness can be positively dealt with. There was a significant interaction effect ($R^2=0.131$) seen among the variables which confirmed the hypothesis of the research. This study aimed to check how hopelessness can be linked with the skills learned by a student going through a gap year. For this reason, the researchers chose a sample of 300 students who were going through an academic gap year and may have been acquiring some kind of skill. The results showed that the number of skills acquired had a significant relationship with the hopelessness of the students going through a gap year which indicates that learning skills during a gap year can help the students to deal with the hopelessness they go through at that specific period.

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