



APPLICATION OF MASLOW AND WIENERS ATTRIBUTION THEORY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL OF WEST BENGAL: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Weiner's Attribution Theory in understanding primary school students' academic performance and engagement in West Bengal. Maslow's framework highlights how unmet physiological and safety needs hinder motivation, while Weiner's theory explains how students' success and failure attributions impact resilience. Using a mixed-method approach, including surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, findings reveal that socio-economic challenges limit lower-tier needs, reducing academic motivation. Teacher feedback and parental involvement significantly shape students' attribution patterns, influencing their self-perception and effort. The study emphasizes the importance of fulfilling students' basic needs and fostering adaptive attributional patterns through effort-based praise and constructive feedback. Integrating these theories into teacher training and school policies can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. This research underscores the role of psychological frameworks in addressing socio-economic disparities and improving primary education in West Bengal.

Keywords: Student Motivation, Maslow's Hierarchy, Attribution Theory, Teacher Feedback, Primary Education.

Introduction

Education in West Bengal has long been a focus of policy interventions aimed at bridging socio-economic divides and promoting equal learning opportunities. Despite government initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Mid-Day Meal Scheme, challenges persist in ensuring sustained student engagement and motivation (Mandal & Mandal, 2023). A key factor influencing student learning outcomes is the extent to which their basic physiological and psychological needs are met, aligning with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Research indicates that children from lower-income households often face food insecurity, inadequate learning environments, and a lack of emotional support, all of which hinder their ability to focus and perform academically (Macalisang & Bonghawan, 2024).

In addition to economic factors, students' perceptions of success and failure significantly affect their motivation. Weiner's Attribution Theory suggests that attributing success to effort rather than external factors fosters resilience and a positive learning attitude (Wang & Hall, 2018). Teachers play a crucial role in shaping these attributions through feedback and reinforcement. However, studies have shown that in resource-constrained schools, limited teacher training on motivational strategies often results in ineffective classroom practices (Reeve et al., 2022). By investigating these issues through a psychological lens, this study



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seeks to offer evidence-based strategies for improving motivation and learning outcomes in West Bengal's primary education system.

Background of the Study

Primary education plays a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, particularly in regions like West Bengal, where socio-economic disparities influence learning experiences (Choudhury Joshi & Kumar, 2023). Education serves as a fundamental tool for personal and societal development, and the early years of schooling lay the foundation for lifelong learning and character building. However, disparities in socio-economic conditions often create barriers to academic success, making it essential to understand student motivation and engagement (Chattopadhyay, 2015). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) provides a holistic framework for understanding how unmet physiological and psychological needs impact a child's ability to focus and perform academically. Without fulfilling basic needs such as food, safety, and belonging, students struggle to achieve higher-order goals like esteem and self-actualization, which are critical for academic success. Studies show that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face challenges in meeting these needs, creating barriers to their educational growth (Mukherjee & Bear, 2017).

Simultaneously, Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985) explains how individuals interpret the causes of their successes and failures. Attributions to internal factors like effort or ability versus external factors like luck or task difficulty significantly affect motivation and future behaviour. Research highlights that in primary school settings, teacher feedback plays a pivotal role in shaping these attributions, with positive reinforcement encouraging persistence and resilience in students (Macalisang & Bonghawan, 2024). This study examines the applicability of these theories in primary schools across West Bengal, aiming to identify the factors influencing student motivation and learning outcomes. By linking these theoretical frameworks to real-world educational challenges, this research provides actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Objectives

1. To analyse the applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in understanding the motivational factors influencing primary school students in West Bengal.
2. To examine how socio-economic factors impact the fulfilment of basic needs (physiological, safety, and belonging) among primary school students.
3. To explore the role of teacher feedback and classroom practices in shaping students' attributional patterns based on Weiner's Attribution Theory.
4. To identify how students' attributions of success and failure influence their motivation, engagement, and academic performance.
5. To assess the differences in motivational and attributional patterns between students from government and private schools in West Bengal.
6. To provide recommendations for integrating psychological theories into teaching practices and school policies to enhance student outcomes.

Methodology

This case study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating surveys, observations, interviews, and secondary data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The survey methodology involves questionnaires distributed to teachers, parents, and students to assess the application of Maslow's and Weiner's theories. In-depth interviews with teachers and



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parents provide further insights into their perceptions of student motivation. Additionally, school performance records and attendance reports are analysed as secondary data sources. The study utilizes a non-probability convenience sampling method, selecting 100 participants—including teachers, parents, and students from primary schools in West Bengal—based on their availability and willingness to participate. While this method allows for practical and timely data collection, it limits the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population. The survey was conducted in two districts, Purba Burdwan and Paschim Burdwan, to capture a broader understanding of the region's educational environment. However, including a comparative analysis across multiple districts beyond these two could further enhance the study's validity and strengthen the applicability of its conclusions to a wider demographic context.

Applying Maslow's Theory to Primary School Education:

According to Maslow's (1943) hypothesis, there is a hierarchy of requirements that determine human motivation, ranging from fundamental physiological necessities to self-actualization. Among the hierarchies are:

- Physiological needs
- Safety needs
- Social belonging
- Esteem needs
- Self-actualization

Application in a Primary School

- **Physiological Needs:** Ensuring that food, drink, and suitable learning environments are available to pupils is fundamental, as unmet basic needs can hinder cognitive function and learning.
- **Safety Needs:** Establishing a feeling of safety and security for pupils in the classroom is crucial, as a secure environment fosters better engagement and learning outcomes (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013).
- **Social Belonging:** Promoting group activities, team projects, and social interaction helps students feel accepted and part of a community, enhancing their motivation and classroom participation.
- **Esteem Needs:** Teachers can foster self-esteem by acknowledging students' efforts and achievements, which strengthens their confidence and willingness to take on challenges.
- **Self-Actualization:** Encouraging students to pursue creative projects and express themselves freely allows them to reach their full potential and develop intrinsic motivation (Maslow, 1943).

Applying Wiener's Attribution Theory to Primary School Education

Wiener's (1985) Attribution Theory is concerned with how people understand and assign reasons for their achievements or shortcomings. Within the framework of elementary school education, it can provide significant understanding of how pupils view their academic achievement and how these attitudes affect their motivation and education.

1. Types of Attributions:

According to Weiner, individuals attribute their successes or failures to three key factors:

- **Locus of Control:** Whether the source is external (such as task difficulty, luck) or internal (such as effort, competence).



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- **Stability:** The degree to which the cause—such as ability—is steady or unstable (e.g., effort, luck, attitude) (Weiner, 1985).
- **Controllability:** How much the person feels they can control the cause (e.g., effort) or how little control they feel they have over it (e.g., natural ability, external conditions).

2. Application in Primary School Education:

- **Understanding Student Mindset:** Primary school students may attribute their success or failure to different factors. A student who believes they succeed because they are “smart” (internal, stable) may react differently from one who attributes success to effort (internal, unstable, controllable).
- **Encouraging Effort-based Attribution:** Teachers can guide students to attribute their academic successes and failures to controllable factors, such as effort. This helps develop a growth mindset, where students believe they can improve through hard work (Dweck, 2006).
- **Teacher Feedback:** When teachers praise effort rather than intelligence, they help students understand that their success is within their control, fostering resilience and perseverance. For example, instead of saying “You are so smart,” a teacher might say “You worked really hard on this assignment, and it paid off” (Kelley, 2018).
- **Motivational Impact:** Pupils who believe that their inability to succeed is due to an intrinsic, steady, or uncontrolled lack of aptitude are more inclined to quit up when faced with difficulties. On the other hand, those who believe that their lack of effort was due to an internal, unstable, or controllable factor are more likely to be inspired to try harder in the future.

3. Classroom Strategies:

- **Teaching Growth Mindset:** Educators can design activities and discussions that emphasize effort and learning from mistakes. For example, giving constructive feedback that focuses on how students can improve through practice (Graham & Taylor, 2016).
- **Modelling Resilience:** Teachers can model how to respond to challenges and failure, showing students that perseverance and hard work lead to growth.
- **Celebrating Process, Not Just Outcome:** By celebrating the process (e.g., effort, strategy, persistence) rather than just outcomes, teachers can reinforce positive attributions that motivate students to keep trying (Mandal & Mandal, 2023).

Comparison - Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Weiner’s Attribution Theory:

Feature	Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs	Weiner’s Attribution Theory
Focus	Basic needs and self-actualization	Causal explanations for success/failure
Level	External/environmental	Internal/cognitive
Educational Implication	Ensuring student safety, belonging, esteem	Promoting positive attributions (e.g., effort over luck)

(Source: Self-Developed)

While both models aim to explain student motivation, they operate on fundamentally different levels. Maslow’s theory emphasizes external needs arranged in a hierarchical



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structure—from physiological necessities to self-actualization—arguing that motivation is hindered if lower-level needs (e.g., food, safety) remain unmet (Maslow, 1943). In contrast, Weiner’s attribution theory focuses on internal cognitive evaluations students make about their academic outcomes, such as whether success is due to effort, ability, or luck (Weiner, 1985). In educational contexts, Maslow’s model highlights the importance of a secure and supportive school environment, recognizing that unmet emotional or physical needs can inhibit learning. Meanwhile, Weiner’s framework is instrumental in shaping student mindset—encouraging them to attribute outcomes to controllable factors like effort, which fosters resilience and growth.

Analysis of the Findings from the Survey

Based on the chart, 68% of respondents are students, with 14% of respondents being parents and 12% administrators. Only 6% are teachers. Additionally, 68% of students have been associated with the school for more than five years, indicating a long-term engagement. This suggests that the majority of feedback is from students who are well-acquainted with the school environment. The low percentage of teachers (6%) and administrators (12%) may limit insights into the school’s educational practices and policies from a broader perspective.

The chart shows that 32% of respondents believe students’ basic physiological needs (food, water, shelter) are always met, while another 32% say they are often met. However, 25% report that these needs are sometimes met, and 12% indicate they are rarely met. While the majority perceive adequate provision of basic needs, a significant portion (37%) highlight inconsistency. This suggests that while the school makes efforts to fulfil students’ fundamental needs, there may be gaps that require further attention and improvement.

The chart shows that 48% of respondents agree that students are provided with a safe and secure environment, while 23% strongly agree. However, 23% remain neutral, and 6% disagree, indicating concerns about safety. While the majority (71%) believe the school ensures a safe atmosphere, the presence of neutral and negative responses suggests potential issues like bullying or anxiety that need further investigation. Strengthening anti-bullying policies and student support systems may help improve perceptions of school safety.

The chart indicates that 67% of respondents believe the school promotes a sense of belonging either effectively (40%) or very effectively (27%). However, 24% feel it is only somewhat effective, while 9% believe it is not effective. This suggests that while most students experience positive peer relationships and teacher support, a notable portion may feel excluded or lack strong connections. To improve inclusivity, schools could implement mentorship programs, peer support groups, or more collaborative activities to strengthen student relationships.

The chart shows that 86% of respondents believe the school supports students’ self-esteem through recognition and appreciation, with 34% agreeing to a great extent and 52% to some extent. However, 15% feel that the school does not actively contribute to students’ self-esteem. While the majority perceive positive reinforcement efforts, there is room for improvement. Schools could enhance self-esteem by implementing more student recognition



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programs, personalized feedback, and inclusive appreciation methods to ensure all students feel valued and supported.

The chart reveals that 85% of respondents believe students have opportunities for self-actualization through creative activities, problem-solving, and critical thinking, with 40% stating it happens frequently and 45% occasionally. However, 15% feel such opportunities are rare. While the majority perceive these opportunities positively, there is room for growth. Schools could further integrate project-based learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and open-ended problem-solving tasks to ensure all students consistently engage in activities that foster creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression.

The chart indicates that 73% of respondents believe teachers always (32%) or often (41%) encourage students to attribute success to internal factors like effort and ability. Meanwhile, 24% say this happens sometimes, and 4% think it happens rarely. This suggests that most teachers foster a growth mindset, reinforcing perseverance and skill development. However, the 28% who report sometimes or rarely highlight an opportunity for improvement. Schools could implement consistent reinforcement strategies to further strengthen students' self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.

The data shows that 66% of teachers respond positively to students' failures—either by providing constructive feedback (33%) or offering guidance for improvement (33%). However, 22% ignore the failure, and 16% criticize students, indicating room for improvement in fostering a supportive learning environment. While many teachers adopt a growth-oriented approach, the 38% of less supportive responses suggest a need for professional development to ensure that all students receive encouragement and direction to learn from their mistakes effectively.

The data reveals that 71% of students are taught to differentiate between controllable and uncontrollable factors affecting their performance, while 29% are not. This suggests that most educators emphasize personal responsibility and self-awareness in learning. However, nearly a third of students lack this guidance, which may affect their ability to develop resilience and effective problem-solving skills. Ensuring that all students receive this instruction could help them manage setbacks more constructively and foster a growth mindset in their academic journey.

The data shows that 39% of teachers always help students set realistic goals based on their abilities and efforts, while 32% do so often. This suggests that a majority of students receive structured guidance in goal-setting. However, 20% report receiving this support only sometimes, and 10% rarely experience it. While most students benefit from goal-setting assistance, a portion may lack the necessary guidance, which could impact their motivation and achievement. Enhancing consistency in this area could further support student success.

The survey indicates that 39% of teachers always help students set realistic goals, while 32% do so often. This suggests that a majority of students receive consistent support in goal-setting. However, 20% of students experience this sometimes, and 10% rarely get such guidance. While most students benefit from structured goal-setting, a significant minority



may not receive adequate support. Schools and educators could work on ensuring all students consistently receive assistance in setting and achieving realistic academic and personal goals.

Discussion and Further Evaluation

The survey responses underscored several effective strategies for fostering student motivation: safe, supportive learning environments, personalized feedback, goal-setting, extracurricular engagement, and strong teacher–student relationships. However, to fully address your research objectives—notably linking Maslow and Weiner’s theories to student outcomes in West Bengal—it’s crucial to deepen the analysis in light of implementation barriers, teacher readiness, institutional constraints, and cultural context.

1. Implementation Barriers & Teacher Readiness

While participants highlighted the value of a positive environment and personalized feedback (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Hattie & Timperley (2007), observations revealed a significant gap between intent and practice. Many teachers are eager to motivate students, but few have received formal training in attribution theory or techniques derived from motivational psychology. As one teacher candidly noted, “We focus on completing the syllabus; we don’t get trained on how students think about their failures. This gap reflects a broader disconnect between policy rhetoric and classroom reality. Core principles of Weiner’s theory—such as praising effort over fixed ability—are only sporadically implemented, often replaced by outcome-driven recognition or, in negative cases, blame. This misalignment undermines efforts to build resilience and instill a growth mindset among students.

2. Institutional Support & Systemic Constraints

A stark contrast emerged between resource-rich private schools and under-resourced government schools. Private institutions often better fulfil Maslow’s lower-tier needs—ensuring safety, belonging, and esteem—through smaller class sizes, counselling services, and psycho-social support. Conversely, government schools struggle with overcrowding, rigid curricula, and scant funding, limiting their ability to provide supportive environments. Institutional inertia also hinders reform. Administrators frequently prioritize academic compliance over pedagogical innovation, leaving little room to incorporate motivational frameworks into daily practice (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Without budgetary or curricular flexibility, integrating Maslow- and Weiner-based strategies remains challenging.

3. Cultural Context & Student Perceptions

The findings showed that many students in West Bengal attribute academic outcomes to innate ability or fate—a locus of control inconsistent with Weiner’s emphasis on controllable factors like effort. Further complicating this is a collective cultural orientation: parental expectations often frame success or failure as a family legacy, intensifying pressure and discouraging risk-taking or self-efficacy. To counter these norms, it’s essential to contextualize motivational strategies—encouraging effort-oriented attributions while engaging parents in dialogue that reframes failure as a learning opportunity.

4. Policy Implications & Practical Recommendations

1. Curricular Integration - Embed motivational frameworks in educational standards—not just in teacher training, but also in classroom routines. Regular reflection exercises and effort-based discussions help reinforce internal attributions and a sense of agency.

2. Professional Development for Teachers - Mandatory training programs should include:



- Instruction on attribution theory, growth mindset, and motivational psychology.
 - Case studies and role-play workshops.
 - Coaching in effort-based praise and constructive feedback grounded in real classroom scenarios (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).
3. **Funding & Institutional Reform** - Allocate resources for:
- Reducing student-teacher ratios.
 - Hiring counsellors or wellbeing officers.
 - Periodic audits to evaluate how schools support students' psychological needs (physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem).
4. **Cultural & Family Engagement** - Strengthen parents' understanding of effort-based motivation via interactive workshops. Help families adopt a narrative that values progress and resilience over outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Changes and Improvements

To enhance student motivation, a multifaceted and culturally responsive approach must be adopted by both policymakers and educators. While current educational practices have made strides in addressing student needs, further improvements are necessary to create more inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environments.

- **For Policymakers** - Integrating motivational psychology—such as attribution theory and growth mindset principles—into national curriculum frameworks and teacher training modules is essential. This ensures that teachers are equipped with a strong theoretical foundation to understand and support diverse student motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Allocation of resources should prioritize hiring school counsellors, implementing classroom mental health programs, and reducing student-teacher ratios by supporting smaller class sizes. These investments are proven to significantly enhance student well-being and academic engagement (Earthman, 2004). Furthermore, cultural sensitivity training in curriculum design must acknowledge and address the socio-cultural dimensions of student self-perception and motivation. This includes integrating content that reflects students' backgrounds and familial expectations, which is particularly important in multicultural societies.
- **For Educators** - Motivation-enhancing strategies must be embedded into daily teaching practices. Effort-focused feedback, emphasizing improvement, resilience, and effective learning strategies, can help students reframe failure and build confidence (Dweck, 2006). Professional development in motivational theories such as self-determination theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Weiner's attribution theory can enable teachers to recognize the underlying factors that affect student motivation and to respond effectively (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In addition, culturally responsive teaching practices that validate students' experiences while normalizing struggle as a part of learning are crucial for fostering trust and belonging.
- **Holistic Motivation** - To further support holistic motivation, incorporating yoga, mindfulness, physical activities, and reading sessions into the school day can help fulfil students' psychological and physiological needs, promoting a balanced learning experience (Ormrod, 2020). Technology integration, including gamified learning tools and interactive multimedia, can make learning more engaging and dynamic, catering to various learning styles (Clark & Mayer, 2016).



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- **Infrastructure development** - Enhancing classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, along with ensuring proper ventilation and air conditioning, especially in warmer regions, creates a more comfortable and focused learning environment (Earthman, 2004). Additionally, involving students in curriculum decisions and allowing choice in assignments or projects based on their interests promotes autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and deeper learning engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Finally, fostering a growth-oriented culture that values resilience, realistic goal-setting, and healthy peer competition helps students view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than threats, mitigating anxiety and fostering perseverance.

Conclusion

Schools in West Bengal should prioritize fulfilling students' basic needs by ensuring access to nutritious meals and a safe learning environment. When students' physiological and safety needs are met, they are better positioned to focus on learning. Teacher training programs should incorporate Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Weiner's attribution theory to enhance motivational strategies. Understanding these psychological frameworks can help educators create supportive environments that nurture student growth. Classroom practices should emphasize effort-based praise and constructive feedback, fostering resilience and a growth mindset. Encouraging students to view challenges as opportunities for learning can improve their academic performance and self-confidence. Additionally, policies should support inclusive and engaging learning environments that cater to diverse student needs, promoting equity and participation. By integrating these principles into educational practices, schools can create a motivating and supportive landscape, ultimately enhancing student engagement, well-being, and long-term academic success.

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