

## Approaches to learning: A comparative study

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### Abstract

A number of researches have taken place in Approaches to Learning theory over three decades. In this research paper the researcher has tried to understand the differences between the Approaches to Learning of males and females. The research is conducted for the students of standard VII in S.S.C board school of western Mumbai.

Approaches to Learning helps us to understand how students approach towards their academic studies. It maybe a Deep Approach to Learning, a Surface Approach to Learning or a Strategic Approach to Learning. In this research the researcher has tried to understand how students approach towards their learning based on gender. In this research paper the researcher has studied about the gender differences between the male and female students Approaches to Learning. The current research paper also makes the students aware of their Approaches to Learning with the help of an explanation session. The findings of the study revealed that there is no significant difference between the Approaches to Learning of male and female students.

However it was revealed from the result that male students had higher mean score than the female students though the results were not statistically significant.

**KEYWORDS:** Approaches to Learning, Gender (Male and Female), Middle School, Deep Approach to Learning, Surface Approach to Learning, Strategic Approach to Learning.

### Introduction:

Students have different approaches to learning. There is a relationship between the approaches to learning adopted by the students and their level of understanding. The research approaches to learning was originally undertaken by Matron and Saljo(1976) and it was further developed by Entwistle (1997), Biggs (1988).

The concepts that emerged from the researches was the idea that students can take different Approaches to Learning. These approaches are not stable or defined traits in the individuals. Some students might take a deep approach while some may tend towards a surface approach. In this study Approaches to Learning is divided into three parts as given in the following diagram.

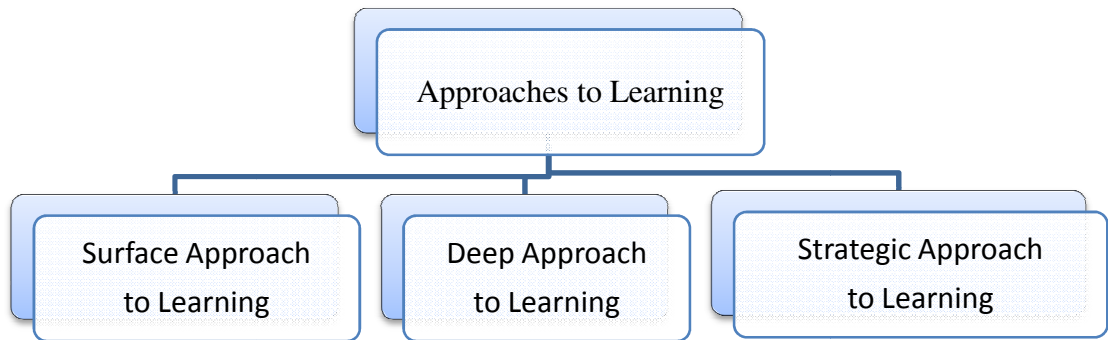


Figure 1: Sub- division of Approaches to Learning

Surface Approach to Learning deals with student's intention to learn only to achieve grades. The students with Surface Approach to Learning memorise the subject matter rather than making efforts to understand it. They tend to study the content only with the intention of grades and examination. Deep Approach to Learning deals with completely understanding the subject matter. They seek to understand the deep meaning of the subject matter rather than memorising it. These students take an intrinsic enjoyment in learning. The students with Strategic Approach to Learning apply the best strategies to achieve the highest possible grades. They try to understand the subject matter keeping in line with the evaluation patterns.

Students of middle school in SSC board of schools of Western Mumbai will be examined in this research study. Each student will be examined on the basis of the questionnaire designed to evaluate the students' Approaches to Learning.

**Need of the study:**

A study needs to be conducted to study the differences between the approaches of learning of male and female students of SSC Board schools in western Mumbai. After the review of related literature a need was felt to conduct this study at the middle school level. Students approaches to learning will be studied under this study. The study will try to identify the various approaches to learning adopted by the students. Through this study that teachers will be able to motivate the students towards adopting a suitable learning approach which can lead to high academic achievement. The research study is conducted on the middle school students which is the foundation of further educational career.

The main purpose of this study is to study the differences between the approaches to learning of male and female students of SSC Board schools in western Mumbai.

**Operational Definition of the Variables:**

**Approaches to Learning:-**

Approaches to Learning refers to observable behaviours that indicate the way students engage in academic activities and approach towards their academic pursuits. In this

study Approaches to Learning is defined in terms of Surface Learning Approach, Deep Learning Approach and Strategic Learning Approach.

● Surface Learning Approach:-

It refers to learning the content knowledge only with the intention of memorizing the content and reproducing the content during the exam. The students with this approach do not try to understand the subject matter.

● Deep Learning Approach:-

It refers to learning with the aim to understand the subject matter deeply and to gain knowledge of the content. The students with deep learning approach try to learn each and every course material with the aim of deep understanding and gain knowledge.

● Strategic Learning Approach:-

It refers to the learning with the aim to manage time and understand subject matter in such a way that would lead to achieving highest possible grades in a course.

**Objectives of the study:**

1. To study the Approaches to Learning of the female students of middle school in SSC Board of Western Mumbai.
2. To study the Approaches to Learning of the male students of middle school in SSC Board of Western Mumbai.
3. To study the differences between the Approaches to Learning of male and female students of middle school in SSC Board of Western Mumbai.

**Hypothesis of the study:**

There is no significant difference between the Approaches to Learning of male and female students of middle school in SSC Board of Western Mumbai.

**Methodology of the study:**

The main purpose of this research paper is to study the differences between the Approaches to Learning of male and female students of middle school in SSC Board in Western Mumbai. Quantitative research approach will be used to conduct the study because the research objective demands numerical data and statistical data analysis techniques. The study will be conducted as a descriptive research using co-relational study.

**Sample:**

Middle school students were selected for this research paper. Middle school includes the students of standard V, VI, and VII standard students. The researcher here selected

94 students from standard VII. Since the study required a comparison between male and female students. Students were selected from a co-education school of Western Mumbai. 94 students were selected using the random sampling technique from the three divisions of standard VII. 53 male and 41 female students were selected for this research paper.

#### **Tools and techniques of the study:**

A questionnaire is used in order to obtain information from the sample of the study concerning students' Approaches to Learning namely Surface Learning Approach, Deep Learning Approach and Strategic Learning Approach. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire contained 39 questions. Each sub-group of Approaches to Learning i.e. Surface Learning Approach, Deep Learning Approach and Strategic Learning Approach were assessed using 13 questions. The questionnaire was constructed keeping in consideration the age level of VII standard students. The questions were answered by the students using a five point Likert type scale ranging from 5(Agree) to 1(Strongly Disagree). The items of the questionnaire were referred from the previous researches on Approaches to Learning (Biggs, J. B., 1987).

#### **Techniques of Data Analysis:**

1. For testing the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbach's Alpha was calculated.
2. For descriptive data analysis mean and standard deviation was used. The mean of the scores on the questionnaire was analysed based on gender. The standard deviation was calculated for the scores on the questionnaire based on gender.
3. For inferential data analysis T-Test was used to assess the variables according to gender.

#### **Analysis and interpretation of Data:**

Cronbach's Alpha was computed for the Approaches to Learning Questionnaire. 94 students from middle school of SSC Board in Mumbai were given the Achievement Goal Orientation Questionnaire. The value for Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was  $(\alpha) = .88$  which indicates a good reliability score. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the Approaches to Learning for Male and Female students. There were no significant differences ( $t(94) = 0.874$ ,  $df = 92$ ,  $p = >.39$ ) in the scores with mean score for Male ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = .56$ ,  $n = 53$ ) and the mean score for Female ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = .58$ ,  $n = 41$ ) which was not statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. Hence, the research hypothesis "There is no significant difference between the Approaches to Learning of male and female students of middle school in SSC Board" was accepted. It was concluded that there is no significant difference between the male and female students of the middle school in SSC Board with respect to their Approaches to Learning.

Table 1. Comparing the male and female students with respect to their Approaches to Learning					
Gender					
Variable		<u>Males</u> (n=53)	<u>Females</u> (n=41)	<u>t-value</u>	<u>Sig.</u> (2-tailed)
Approaches to Learning	<i>M</i>	2.96	2.85	0.87	0.39
	<i>SD</i>	0.56	0.58		

The result of the study was that there is no significant difference between the male and female students of the middle school in SSC Board of Western Mumbai with respect to their Approaches to Learning.

The findings of the study is supported by the findings of (Wilson, K. L., Smart, R. M., & Watson, R. J., 1996), (Smith, S. N., & Miller, R. J., 2005). On the other hand (Chiou, G. L., Liang, J. C., & Tsai, C. C., 2012), (Duff, A., 2002) (de la Fuente, J., Sander, P., & Putwain, D., 2013) studied that there is a significant difference between the Approaches to Learning of the male and female students.

#### Major findings of the study:

1. The mean score of the female students for Approaches to learning was 2.85.
2. The mean score of the male students for Approaches to Learning was 2.96.
3. There is no significant difference between the male and female students of the middle school in SSC Board with respect to their Approaches to Learning.
4. The males have higher Approaches to Learning as compared to the female students as the mean score of the male students was higher than that of the female students.

#### Approaches to learning questionnaire:

##### Surface Learning Approach items:

1. I often wonder if the work I am doing is worthwhile.
2. I don't find my studies interesting or relevant.
3. I am not interested in studying but I study due to other reasons.
4. I try to memorise a lot of things in order to learn a lesson.
5. I don't understand much of the subject matter that I learn.
6. I don't really understand what is important during a lecture so I try to write down as much as I can.
7. I often have trouble in understanding the things which I have to learn.
8. I don't read more than what is required to pass in a subject.
9. I try to understand only as many things as much as it is required to pass.
10. I like if I am told exactly what needs to be learned in an essay or other assignment.
11. I often think that I have to learn too many things to study than I can handle.
12. I often worry whether I will be able to complete the school work properly.
13. I often panic if I am continuously trying to complete my studies.

### **Deep Learning Approach items:**

1. I try to understand the meaning of the subject matter with my own efforts.
2. While reading a text I stop from time to time in order to reflect on what I am reading.
3. I try to understand a problem completely before I try to solve it.
4. I try to relate the ideas of one subject with the other subjects of my course.
5. I try to put together all the ideas thoroughly before I start studying a new topic.
6. I try to use my own ideas as far as possible.
7. I am often engrossed in deep thoughts about the topics in my textbooks.
8. I find it exciting to study about various topics in detail.
9. I often find myself thinking about the things taught a class while I am doing other things.
10. I often question the things that I hear in a lecture or read in books.
11. I sometimes feel attached to certain topics and try to study more about it.
12. It is very important for me to understand an argument and find the reasons behind things.
13. I often find that some ideas are really very engaging.

### **Strategic Learning Approach items:**

1. I usually plan my entire week's work in advance either on a paper or in my mind.
2. I am very systematic and organised whenever I revise the lessons for an examination.
3. I plan and organise my study time very effectively in order to make the best use of it.
4. I am able to complete my work very systematically.
5. I keep on studying throughout the semester rather than studying at the last minute.
6. I usually make good use of my time in a day.
7. While writing an exam I concentrate upon the marking scheme and try to impress the examiner.
8. I listen to the teacher's suggestions very carefully in order to increase my marks in the next examination.
9. After finishing an assignment I check it thoroughly to see if it meets the requirements of the course.
10. I always feel motivated to study.
11. I work hard to study because I want to do really well in an examination.
12. I always have clear goals to keep focused on my studies.
13. I always concentrate on the topics which the teacher tells me are important in a course.

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