Learned Helplessness, an exploratory study in underachieving adolescents

العجز المكتسب: دراسة استكشافية عن المراهقين ذوي التحصيل المتدني

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore Learned Helplessness in underachieving adolescent students in a private school in Sharjah. This study investigates fundamental aspects of Learned Helplessness such as its relationship with underachievement, its symptoms, and support strategies. Data collection was done through document analysis, a self – report questionnaire and semi – structured interviews to elicit the viewpoints of participant students, teachers and supervisors on Learned Helplessness in underachieving students. The main findings of the study such as inefficacy, apathy, poor study strategies and lack of support were consistent with the theory and literature on Learned Helplessness. The research emphasizes the need for spreading awareness among educators for the purpose of early detection and effective intervention.

الملخص

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف العجز المكتسب عند الطلبة المراهقين من ذوي التحصيل المتدني في إحدى المدارس الخاصة في الشارقة. هذه الدراسة تحرت الجوانب الجوهرية للعجز المكتسب كعلاقته بالتحصيل المتدني، عوارضه، و سبل المساعدة. جمعت البيانات عبر تحليل الوثائق، و الاستبيان الذاتي، والمقابلات شبه المنظمة لاستخلاص وجهات النظر من الطلبة، والمعلمين، والمشرفين المشاركين حول قضية العجز المكتسب عند ذوي التحصيل المتدني. و قد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة : كاللاّ فاعلية، اللا مبالاة، ضعف استراتيجيات الدراسة، والافتقار الى المعونة تطابقا مع الجانب النظري و العرض الأدبي لقضية العجز المكتسب، وتؤكد هذه الدراسة الحاجة الماسة لنشر الوعي حول قضية العجز المكتسب عند العاملين في مجال التعليم بغية الكشف المبكر وفاعلية التدخل.

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my beloved father

for his continuous encouragement,

for instilling in me the love of learning,

and for being the wisest teacher of a lifetime,

to my dear mother, husband, and daughters

for their support and patience.

Acknowledgement

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May Allah bless your families and see you through hardship.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

"Why bother? It's not gonna make a difference". A typical response that teachers hear from challenged student's year in, year out; a response that warrants attention to the mindset behind the words. How can we prove to those students that their effort can and will make a difference? According to Bandura (1997, p.127), "People who credit their successes to personal capabilities and their failures to insufficient effort will undertake difficult tasks and persist in the face of failure". Moreover, recurrent successes fortify ones faith in his/her capabilities while failures diminish that faith (Bandura, 1997). Students are bound to experience failure in modern day schooling systems, as they are constantly exposed to assessments that attempt to evaluate their academic performance. Students who fail frequently are at risk of learned helplessness and may ultimately become demotivated, depressed and drop out of school (Schroder and Ollis, 2013). Learned helplessness can cripple motivation, and the issue of motivating students has long been of paramount concern to educators; likewise scholarly papers have addressed interventions on how to best motivate learners to learn (McDowell, 2009) and how to push forward and convert a set back into a learning opportunity in ones learning career. McDowell asserts that, "When a person feels like the outcome of an activity is beyond their control, their motivation diminishes and will cease working towards their goal" (2009, p. 5-6). Alloy et al. (1984) postulate that people who are subjected to uncontrollable circumstances learn that the outcomes are unassociated with their responses, this translates to an expectation that responses are ineffective and can transfer to other situations to intervene with future learning, this phenomenon is learned helplessness.

Despite the pervasiveness of learner centric instruction, which involves tailoring curricula to cater for the diverse needs and abilities of learners in a classroom, some students are still falling between the cracks. The 'seemingly indifferent attitude' that students have towards an area of study conveys a message worth looking into. For many, indifference is a form of dignified submission after struggling with the disappointment of underachievement. The UAE has attributed much attention to the rights and needs of underprivileged learners who are recognized as having physical, mental, or emotional learning

difficulties, and require special education needs. Although this is a generalized and contentious definition; learned helplessness does not fall under its umbrella.

1.2 Significance of the study

While aspects of motivation have been widely researched and contended in the UAE, learned helplessness is relatively new. Demotivation and learned helplessness coincide in their detrimental effect on academic performance, though learned helplessness is a curious phenomenon yet to be explored in the context of UAE's schools. This paper is an investigation into the realms of learned helplessness in one of Sharjah's private schools. Al- **** International School (K– 12) which follows the curriculum of the Ministry of Education (MOE), has over 3000 students enrolled in its classes. This study intends to shed light on the association between learned helplessness and underachievement, by exploring students' perceptions and reaction towards failure, coupled with teachers and supervisors outlook on the matter. The study involves adolescent students falling within the age group of 12 to 15. Adolescents will have reached cognitive maturation that allows them better reasoning and synthesis of life experiences (Cook & Cook, 2005). Furthermore, "The way in which adolescents develop and exercise their personal efficacy during this period can play a key role in setting the course their life paths take" (Bandura, 1997, p. 177).

Fuelled by UAE's aspiring leadership to target a "first – rate education system" (UAE Vision 2021), student achievement levels have become a major concern. Sufficient evidence on the comparable poor performance of UAE pupils on standardized international examinations such as: PISA, CEPA, TIMSS and PIRLS, as well as the national examination UAENAP have elicited inquiries into the underlying reasons, giving way to additional assessments and evaluations that have increased the stress on learners to perform. Sharjah, which was elected the Islamic Culture Capital for the year 2014, comprises 229 k – 12 schools, 100 of which are private (Ahmad 2014). In line with the Ministry of Education's strategy to improve the education system and enhance accountability, accreditation committees visited all schools in the Emirate to determine their effectiveness in 6 focus areas including: Students' personal development and students' attainment and progress. The 3 schools that are explored in the study were

rated ‘highly effective’ in all 6 focus areas. This paper questions the extent that learned helplessness jeopardizes student achievement, and whether at risk students qualify for intervention programs.

1.3 Rationale of the study

As a teacher and academic supervisor for adolescent learners in particular, the researcher was baffled at students’ inactivity and disinterest in school subjects despite all efforts to lure them and awaken their enthusiasm. Are their poor scores the cause of their lack of effort? Or is their lack of effort the cause of their poor scores? These students were puzzling because they had willingly ceased to seek support, and simply surrendered to the illusion that nothing further can be done. Working with what the researcher knew about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, some students began to respond and switch to the, ‘where there’s a will there’s a way’ mindset. However, for some students the dilemma was much deeper, and verbal motivation was futile. The seriousness and recurrence of learned helplessness (LH) incentivized the researcher to probe further into this pattern of behavior defined by neurobiological research as, “A maladaptive response to uncontrollable stress characterized by impaired motor escape responses, reduced motivation and learning deficits” (Salomons et al. 2012).

1.4 Research Questions

With the aim of reporting the reality of learned helpless students and their struggle with underachievement, this paper centralizes on the following questions:

1- What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?
2- Is there an observable pattern of behavior that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?
3- What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?

1.5 Outline of the study

This study is organized into 6 chapters. The Introduction (Chapter 1) briefly maps out why LH is a cause for concern in education. The Literature Review (Chapter 2) highlights the origins of LH theory, its reformulation, and the neurobiological interpretations of this phenomenon, in addition to the international literature on the impact of learned helplessness in education, and an overview of the education system in the UAE. The Methodology section (Chapter 3) describes the field work undertaken to collect the data for the case study by utilizing a mixed method approach that includes: document analysis, semi – structured interviews, and a self report questionnaire. The Findings section (Chapter 4) displays the results of the fieldwork, while the results (Chapter 5) are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. Finally, potential recommendations are summarized (Chapter 6) in light of the findings of this study paving the way for further research into LH.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature review

The following section explores critical aspects pertaining to LH and its relation to underachievement, namely: cognitive theory, the development of the LH hypothesis and perspectives of underachievement on both the international and the local levels respectively.

2.1 Cognitive theory

The philosophical presumptions of cognitive theory have long been rooted in psychiatry and psychology (Clark et al., 1999). The two main tenets of cognitive theory are: construction of meaning, and consciousness.

2.1.1 Construction of meaning

The cognitive theory of learning proliferated during the mid 1970's and accounted for the, "Processing, storage and retrieval of knowledge in the mind" (Slavin, 2014, p.126). Information processing is explained by Clark et al. (1999, p.57) as, "The cognitive function of perceiving, assimilating, and elaborating the meaning of our experiences. Significantly, stimulus reception which is common to humans and infra human species is the function of the sensory system. However, stimulus perception, which is the mind's interpretation, depends on the interplay of variables such as background information, previous experience and the mental state of the human (Slavin, 2014). Clark et al. (1999) postulate that human cognition and the construction of meaning have a direct impact on human behavior and emotion. "Our personal realities may differ, but we are all faced with the demands of survival, community, and productivity" (1999, pp. 56–57), elaborating that construed meaning is subjective, relative to each individual, and differing from one individual to another. In parallel, Bandura (1997) posits that cognitive constructions guide human behavior, their beliefs about their capabilities influence how they respond in situations and "the types of anticipatory scenarios and visualized futures they construct" (p. 116).

2.1.1 Consciousness

Researchers have highlighted the level of consciousness as an element of bearing in cognitive theory. "Information processing occurs on a continuum of consciousness – unconsciousness that results in varying degrees of awareness and accessibility to the processes and products of thought" (Clark at al. 1999 p.58). Consciousness is defined in the online Oxford Dictionary as, "The state of being aware of and responsive to one's surroundings". Prevalent behavioral theories, such as the preliminary model of LH, that claimed to treat psychological disorders witnessed severe criticism during the mid 1970's and resorted to rethinking theoretical assumptions based on purely behaviorist notions to explain anxiety and depressive manifestations. A new emphasis on information processing emerged to substitute for the stimulus – response model, hereafter assigning a rudimentary role to consciousness in correcting psychological disorders (Clark et al. 1999).

2.2 Social cognitive theory and self efficacy

Social cognition rests on the tenet that the cultural context of a child will determine to a degree what is regarded as important, based on Piaget's construct of children's phasic cognitive development which pivots around individual discovery and interaction with the environment, as well as Vygotsky's views that stress the social context of learning as deterministic of cognitive development (Robson, 2006). Dunn (1988, cited in Robson, 2006) posits that children develop basic social competencies that will shape their thought processes in later stages. They learn to understand the feelings, goals and moods of others, as well as the social norms and boundaries of the communities they are in.

Bandura (1997) explicates that the main social influences on a child's self efficacy are; family, peers, and school. He emphasizes the role of responsive parents who are able to provide opportunities for discovery from infancy, and who nurture goal orientation and pursuit. Peers who are similar in age and experience provide the reference point to compare and verify self efficacy. The school is the main atmosphere in which social cognitive structures are cultivated. However, school settings can be detrimental to a child's self efficacy. Comparative evaluations of teachers and activities that are competitive rather than cooperative tend to weaken academic self efficacy. Ability groupings can

devalue the self efficacy of pupils relegated to low achievement groups. Schunk and Pajares (2002) agree that as students progress through school their beliefs about self efficacy are discouraged, especially when low achievers rate their performance as inferior to their classmates in settings where comparisons are permissible. They believe that children's self efficacy is fortified when parents model perseverance and teach them how to overcome difficulties.

2.3 Preliminary model of LH theory

LH theory originated in the laboratory, for an interval of ten years, scientists were experimenting with infrahuman species to explore the underlying reasons why organisms that were exposed to uncontrollable stimuli manifested unusual behavioral disruptions. Dogs are effectively taught to avoid shock by escaping over a barrier in a shuttle box. However, when dogs were subjected to unavoidable shocks, they failed to acquire the necessary escape response (Overmier and Seligman, 1967; Seligman and Maier, 1967). Similarly, the debilitating effect of uncontrollable aversive stimuli was apparent in cats, fish, as well as in rats. Consequently, the LH hypothesis was grounded on two observations: First, the organism learns that its escape response is *independent* of the termination of aversive stimuli. Second, this learning *weakens* its incentive to escape (Maier, Peterson and Schwartz, 2000). Further investigations into human behavior yielded analogous findings. Hiroto's experiment (1974) consisted of two stages. The first stage involved college students who were divided among three groups. Group (1) received controllable loud noise that was terminated by pushing a button several times, group (2) received uncontrollable loud noise that terminated inconsistently regardless of their responses, and group (3) received no noise. In the second stage of the experiment, the three groups were tested on a hand shuttle box. The subjects could terminate the noise by moving a lever from one end of the box to the other. Interestingly, groups (1) and (3) learned the necessary response, but group (2) listened to the noise, thus failing to acquire the requisite response. The LH hypothesis was grounded on formal findings of animal experimentation. Nonetheless, further investigation into human behavioral disorders rendered the framework questionable and fragmented.

2.4 Reformulated LH hypothesis and attributional style

The basic LH model was criticized in its attempt to extrapolate and generalize animal findings to humans. Further exploration into human responses led to theoretical controversies about the impact of uncontrollability which the attributional framework had attempted to resolve (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978). Attributional style refers to the explanation that a person utilizes to make sense of the situation at hand, thus an individual ascribes causes and consequences to explain the uncontrollable events he/she has undergone. This personal explanation determines whether an individual is susceptible to LH or not. The reformulated LH theory hypothesizes that when a person learns that outcomes are beyond control, three defects become consequential:

1- Motivational: voluntary responses are suppressed.
2- Cognitive: it becomes difficult to learn that responses can actually impact outcomes.
3- Emotional: feelings of helplessness and worthlessness surface and influence thoughts and behavior.

To sum up, individuals do not exhibit LH simply by *experiencing* uncontrollability, but by *believing* that the outcomes are uncontrollable (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978). Researchers elaborate that different causal attributions yield different responses, the following attributions are proposed:

1- Personal / internal helplessness: the case of individuals believing that they are unable to solve a problem which is readily solvable to other people in the same circumstances.
2- Universal / external helplessness: when neither the individuals nor other people in the same circumstances can solve the problem. Abramson (1977) indicated that lowered self esteem occurs in instances of personal helplessness.
3- Global helplessness: refers to helplessness symptoms occurring in a broad range of situations, regardless of the similarity of the situations.
4- Specific helplessness: occurs in a narrow range of similar incidents.
5- Chronic / stable helplessness: is repetitive and persists for a long time.
6- Temporary / unstable helplessness: is non recurrent and lasts for a short while.

When individuals attribute their helplessness to internal, global, and stable factors, helplessness is acute, contrary to attributing helplessness to external, specific, and unstable factors (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978; Zimmerman, 1990). A study conducted by Brunstein and Olbrich (1985, cited in Zimmerman, 1990) deduced that following exposure to uncontrollable events, state – dependent individuals exhibited performance decrements, whereas action – oriented individuals did not withhold their effort. In addition, a study of 108 graduates (Coyne at al. 1980) demonstrated that helplessness which led to deficient performance was in fact the result of anxiety. Failure experiences induced a negative self image irrelevant of the task itself for LH prone individuals. Maier et al. (2000) observed that investigations into LH have offered insight as to the causes of human maladaptation, and elucidated that, individuals who perceive uncontrollability of bad events as stable and global are at risk for helplessness and for failure to adapt. Individuals who perceive uncontrollable bad events as internal are prone to loss of self esteem. The attributional reformulation is based on the assumption that people are rational beings that resort to a logical analysis of their experiences. This 'rationality' is of utility to positive psychology which explains the dichotomy of helplessness versus resilience and puts it to therapeutic use.

Research into the phenomenon of LH has yet taken another direction. Seligman et al. (1984) have found that explanatory styles of parents and their children have a strong resemblance and are in fact heritable to a moderate degree (Schulman, Keith and Seligman, 1993 cited in Maier, 2000). Investigations into the inheritability factor will be invaluable to LH literature.

2.5 Neurobiology and Learned Helplessness

As technological advances in the medical field have allowed for unprecedented anatomical observations into the human brain, various cortical circuitry have been associated with LH. "Given that individual differences in perceived helplessness are associated with both mental and physical health, understanding the mechanisms of these individual differences might be of tremendous clinical benefit" (Salomons et al. 2012, p.1481).

Shumake and Gonzalez – Lima (2003) have suggested the involvement of several brain regions that require investigation in humans. In their integrative study, they have proposed that one brain system or an amalgam of brain systems is perhaps the principal site of dysfunction in those who are at risk of helplessness. They have also considered whether the abnormal manifestations of each brain system are the cause or the result of LH. The study describes that changes in these four brain systems may possibly underlie susceptibility to LH and other emotional disorders.

Kim and Diamond (2002) have stipulated that some neurochemical systems may be involved in propagating stress such as the hippocampus which controls the hypothalamic – pituitary – adrenal axis (HPA axis), and is sensitive to uncontrollable stress.

Salomons et al. (2012) attempted to understand cortical mechanisms of helplessness by assessing the relationship between cortical structure and self reported helplessness in a sample of 17 females who experienced chronic pain, and 17 pain free females. The study implicates that cortical thickness in the supplementary motor area (SMA) and midcingulate cortex (MCC) does correlate with helplessness. The SMA and MCC are connected to brain regions which are responsible for motivational, emotional, and cognitive malfunction in states of LH. The study concludes that:

> [S]tructural characteristics of neural pathways subserving motor planning and function may predispose some individuals to helplessness within the context of an uncontrollable stressor and therefore provide a framework for understanding why some individuals become helpless while others are able to cope with seemingly uncontrollable stressors (Salomons et al. 2012, p.1486).

Data from a study by Maier and Watkins (2005) indicates that uncontrollable stressors induce a state of anxiety that lasts for several days, this mechanism is linked to the dorsal raphe nucleus (DRN), and the corticotrophin releasing hormone (CRH) once activated. Seese et al. (2013) conclude that congenital proneness to depressive behavior distinctively affect excitatory synapses of the infra – limbic cortex, an area in the brain which is associated with mood disorders.

2.6 Learned helplessness in international literature

The majority of studies on LH targeted school, college, and university students ultimately linking LH to *current and prospective learning outcomes*. Few studies were conducted outside the education sector, although findings have proved that LH is a common occurrence that cuts across all domains of life.

An exemplar study was developed under the reformulated theoretical model of LH by Grundtvig Partnership Organization in 2009, where the Learned Helplessness Snapshot, a self report, was created to explore the influence of LH in a variety of client groups over a period of 2 years. The LH Snapshot consists of 4 categories with the aim of probing the mental and psychological state of the subjects:

1- Inability
2- Internal attribution of causes of LH
3- External attribution of causes of LH
4- Change enabler conditions.

The study sample comprised 13 offenders and ex-offenders in England, 17 chronically ill, unemployed, and migrant workers in Sweden, 5 teenage pregnant women and young mothers, and 12 offenders in Portugal, and 17 Roma minority communities in Slovakia. The organization set out to determine whether LH is a barrier for announced, "Positive personal progression" in keeping in line with its policy for, "Promoting social inclusion of disadvantaged people by raising their awareness and empowerment" (Learned Helplessness and the Glory of Failure 2009).

Various measurement tools were devised either solely to assess LH defects, or to evaluate other converging variables such as anxiety, depression and demotivation in students. The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) is one of the earliest instruments which were based on Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale's (1978) attributional dimensions of globality, stability and internality. The 12 hypothetical events are evenly divided as good or bad events, which are again divided into interpersonal or achievement related issues. The subject is required to write one major cause of the event, then relate the cause to the 3 attributional dimensions, rating as well the importance of the described situation. The

ASQ has good internal consistency (Cronbach's coefficient alpha > 0.7), and satisfactory reliability and validity. 130 undergraduate subjects completed the ASQ, the research findings associated ASQ scores with the developments of depressive symptoms after college students performed poorly on a midterm examination (Metalsky, 1982).

The Coping Competence Questionnaire which is founded on helplessness and hopelessness hypotheses of depression, is a self report designed to examine resilience and helplessness. The CCQ measures coping competence through 12 negatively constructed items involving a cognitive, behavioral, and emotional deficit that represent helplessness on a 6- point Likert response scale (ranging from 1= very uncharacteristic of me to 6= very characteristic of me). The scale was originally formulated in German, than translated into English, the scale shows high internal consistency (Chronbach's alpha > 0.9). Researchers assert its high reliability and internal validity, and its unidimensionality and stability over a period of 1 month. The sample consisted of 2,224 under graduate college students. The CCQ promises to be a powerful predictor of depressive symptoms, and the researchers argue that the CCQ has added substantial value to theory-based scales of LH proneness and mental and emotional health. They also indicate that the ASQ is of limited use in clinical applications due to its low prediction of depressive tendencies. The CCQ enables the early detection of subgroups who are susceptible to helplessness upon exposure to repeated failure, and who are likely to fall into a cycle of challenge avoidance, lack of preparation and lowered self-esteem (Schroder and Ollis, 2013).

Conversely, mastery-oriented students believe that success is the product of their effort, thus they exhibit higher levels of motivation and openness towards learning, they are also able to manipulate effective study strategies and thrive at challenging tasks. Following failure LH students develop worse strategies, behave negatively towards tasks by exhibiting anxiety, boredom, and rejection (Dweck and Leggett, 1988, cited in Sorrenti et al. 2014). The study employs a self-report instrument (adapted from the student behavior checklist by Fincham et al. 1989) to measure LH and mastery-oriented tendencies in 104 middle school participants. The LH questionnaire (LHQ) consists of 24 items, 12 items are designated to measure LH, and 12 to measure mastery orientation respectively. Participants had to indicate (on a 5-points Likert scale, 1= not true, 5 = absolutely true) the extent of their agreement to the statements. The LHQ has favorable psychometric characteristics (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7, and good

internal reliability). The main aim of the study was to validate the instrument's utility in detecting helpless and mastery-oriented behaviors. The study concludes that helplessness symptoms are evident by avoidance of challenge, and performance withdrawal upon encountering difficulty, and mastery orientation is characterized by effective endeavor under failure, and aspiring for challenge. Early warning signs call for attention and set the stage for professional intervention (Sorrenti et al. 2014).

McDowell (2009) is concerned with the learning disabled and the helpless, a segment of students who share a dismal belief about their capabilities and are unmotivated to attempt to attain any goal as a result of repeated experiences of failure, this is the cause of their 'stagnation' of learning. He believes that the study of helplessness is intertwined with demotivation; both produce apathetic and disengaged behavior. He suggests that helplessness is the consequence of a negative environment that is lacking in support and predictability, thus the opposite environment is necessary for students to develop the qualities that target success. McDowell mentions that students are in fact aware that *effort* contributes to success. He reports that much research has been done to promote Attributional Retraining (AR) in schools, but specific criteria have to be met to ensure effectiveness (Dresel et al. 2000, cited in McDowell 2009). Several studies concluded that AR wasn't easily executed in classrooms because teachers had difficulty giving attribution feedback at the required level (Borkowski, Weyhing and Carr, 1988; Horner and Gaither, 2004; Robertson et al. 1988, cited in McDowell, 2009). Nonetheless, studies on AR which emphasized linking effort to success found that student's aggressiveness towards peers and their disruptive behavior in class had decreased. AR is effective when it is delivered alongside learning strategies. LH students usually have inadequate learning strategies; hence it is necessary to equip them with the appropriate cognitive and meta cognitive skills (Cheong et al. 2005, cited in McDowell, 2009).

Hsu (2011) conducted a qualitative analysis on LH among EFL college students in Taiwan, by investigating the causal relationships between: failure to learn English, personality traits, and extrinsic / intrinsic motivation. The study conducted focus group interviews, and employed the NEO FF (Five Factor) trait inventory (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness) developed by Costa and McCrae in 1988. It concluded that failure inevitably effects intrinsic motivation. Participants with a neuroticism trait are the most sensitive to failure; neuroticism is

characterized by fear, irritability, depression, shame and guilt. Participants with a low degree of neuroticism are generally more emotionally stable and better at handling pressure.

Yates (2009) examined the psychometric properties of the Student Behavior Checklist (SBC) developed by Fincham et al. 1989 to determine its effectiveness in measuring learned helplessness and mastery orientation in mathematics. The longitudinal 2 phase study involved 293 South Australian students from grade 3-7 (phase l), and 258 students one year later (phase 2).Teachers rated their students behavior on an adapted version of the SBC. It proved to be a reliable scale by which typical behavioral patters of LH can be detected efficiently. Teachers reported that pupils were discouraged, and frequently engaged in off-task behaviors, they complained that the tasks were too difficult, and gave up easily because they believed they had little power to change their learning outcomes. Teachers' ratings were strongly predictive of student's motivation and achievement in the third year following the study. "It is therefore likely that these achievement related behaviors influenced students' actual achievement in mathematics, thus creating a vicious circle in which helplessness and lack of achievement were inextricably intertwined" (p. 100). The researcher shares her concern that teachers need a valid measure to help identify LH behavior "particularly at the primary level before such negative behaviors become entrenched" (p.88).

In their insightful case study, Walling and Martinek (1995) confirm that symptoms of LH are evident is students who show limited persistence in academic and physical tasks, and that teachers are often puzzled as to why students with equal ability persevere to achieve while others simply give up trying. Mastery-oriented students trust their ability to control performance outcomes; this trust is what drives them to accomplish a task and they have also been able to develop a set of problem-solving technique to surmount academic challenges. "An ultimate goal for researchers who have studied the LH phenomenon is to develop effective intervention techniques that will help alleviate this debilitating condition" (p. 455). LH students need to be taught to attribute failure to their lack of *effort*, not to their lack of *ability.* The case study was aimed at developing a comprehensive report of a 13 year old female student (in grade 6 public school in North Carolina) who had a case of extreme LH, and develop a customized intervention plan. Her teachers were unaware of LH, but unanimously complained of her lack of motivation, expectation of failure, and reluctance to accept responsibility. The case study

employed interviews, observation data, and document analysis. The Intellectual Achievement Responsibility questionnaire (IAR, Crandall, Katkovsky and Crandall, 1965) was used as a measure of the subject's beliefs about her personal control over positive and negative experience. Teachers' comments from first grade to sixth grade indicated that she lacked age appropriate social skills and lagged behind her peers academically, especially in spelling, reading and mathematics. The subject was constantly ridiculed and rejected by class mates. She didn't like to perform in PE in front of the class. The subject, "Believed that intellectual and social prowess is a fixed trait and that there was little she could do to change her situation" (p.463). Her lack of confidence combined with her belief that she was 'stupid' had led to a behavior pattern of low persistence and challenge avoidance. The intervention plan was designed to boost the subject's confidence in her ability to perform in PE. It included:

1- After school practice for skills to be used in upcoming classes through modeling and imitation.

2- Experiencing success at skills and becoming familiar with the setting and the equipment.

3- Positive self-talk activities, attribution retraining, and goal-setting.

The study recommends that:

- Teachers emphasize effort and improvement over outcomes, because LH students compare their performance with their peer's performance.
- Classes should be structured to encourage students to practice at their own rate, and to minimize the threat of peer ridicule.
- Encourage students to practice outside of school in a 'no pressure' environment.
- Assign leadership and responsibility roles to students to induce a sense of control. LH students are reluctant and slow and are easily marginalized in favor of the proficient and eager student.

2.7 Underperformance in international literature

From infancy, a sense of achievement and success instigates feelings of pride and trust in ones abilities, and failure experiences induce anger and disappointment. "Failure can become very destructive. Failure is bitter at any time in life when the learner not only feels frustrated but also feels blamed and rejected by others" (Jersild, 1959, p.240). When failure provokes self doubt it is most detrimental. Jersild (1959) asserts that learners 'self acceptance,' which he defines as trust, confidence and positive self-regard will empower him/her to realize their potential and benefit from erring and criticism.

Recently, prospective academic performance has been linked to the quality of conditions and experiences of the earliest stage in life. Novel evidence due to advances in brain research proves that experiences in the first years of life are crucial to development. “The human brain, we now know, grows very rapidly in the first three to five years of life, and what happens in those first years can either promote development or curtail it” (Waldfogel, 1999, p.1). Ramey and Ramey (2002) agree that poor social, cognitive and linguistic skills during preschool years foretell sub average performance in school. Empirical research concludes that children who lag behind their peers in cognitive development have inadequate exposure to particular ‘adult-child transactional experiences’ (Bradley et al. 1989; Hutenlocher et al. 1991; Ramey and Ramey, 2000, cited in Ramey and Ramey, 2002). Transactional experiences are termed; developmental priming mechanisms and are relatively lacking in families with a low socio-economic status. These experiences are detailed as follows:

1- Exploration: adults encourage children to explore their environment and provide opportunities for exploration.

2- Basic skill support: adults mentor children in grouping, identifying, ordering and recognizing patterns and relationships.

3- Celebrating achievement: reinforcing development, giving positive attention to effort.

4- Guidance in new skill acquisition: trusted adults facilitate and support in challenging tasks.

5- Protection from negative response: protection from punishment or ridicule in response to necessary trial/error learning.

6- Highly interactive language environment: open communication.

7- Rule recognition: safe-keeping children, teaching them acceptable conduct.

“Insufficient exposure to these Developmental Priming Mechanisms is hypothesized to negatively affect developmentally appropriate cortical neuronal connections and synaptic efficiency associated with cognitive, linguistic and social development.” (Ramey and Ramey, 2002, p.6). This significant finding was the result of a very ambitious project in the U.S.A, a comprehensive early childhood and family support program which involved the follow up of 57 participants in the intervention group, and 54 in the control group, from birth to preschool, then from Kindergarten to grade 2. The program gave

individualized attention to family circumstances, personalized academic activities at school and at home, particularly in foundational numeracy and literacy skills, as well as summer camps to boost academic competence. The program had lasting positive effects during the first 3 years of the children's lives, and continued to show later as academic competence, the intervention group scored markedly higher in reading and mathematics even at the age of 21. The study deduced that high-quality preschool education that targeted cognitive and social development counteracted poor cognitive development in the child's educational career. (Ramey and Ramey, 2002). Researchers confirm that the quantity and quality of adult-child interaction have a definite impact on early brain development. Alongside neurobiology, sociological practices and health conditions can impede development. Fortunately, they are variables that are amenable to change. (Ramey et al. 2000).

Feinstein (2003) reported similar findings in British children. Based on a longitudinal data set of 2,457 children, assessments were conducted at varying intervals (22 months, 42 months, 60 months, 120 months, and 10 years). Two critical Factors foreshadowed the subjects' academic competence; their preschool scores and their Socio Economic Status (SES). The family background plays an important role and social inequalities dominate academic achievement for the majority of low SES children, posing another challenge for governments who are battling inequality in the education system (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014).

Parents' abilities in supporting their children's learning are a primary influence on how well these students flourish. Cognitive deficits are found at higher levels in children of "manual" parents than in children of "professional" parents (Feinstein, 2003; Melhuish et al. 2001, cited in Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). Although, the poor education of parents is statistically linked to under achievement, Cassen and Kingdon (2007) implicate other variables such as school quality, which they believe accounts for 14% of the reasons behind low achievement. They indicate that class size and lower pupil - teacher - ratios (PTR) have positive impact on outcomes. The study states that the ratio is 3:2 with low achieving boys outnumbering low achieving girls. Substandard scores in reading and writing at the primary level indicate later low achievement. This issue is magnified for students who experience a loss of self-esteem when they fall behind peers in their primary years and continue to perform poorly in their secondary years.

Afzal et al. (2010) found that there is a reciprocal relationship between motivation and performance. Students who are more motivated perform better, and better achievement heightens motivation as demonstrated in the results of 342 university students in Pakistan.

A significant study conducted by Hussien and Albaili (2014) on 1406 students in the UAE, between 6 and 19 years of age. The study employed random selection of Emirates (Al-Ain - Sharjah - Fujairah) schools, classes and finally students. The objective was to investigate the correlation between students' emotional and behavioral problems and academic achievement. They used the Teacher's Emotional and Behavior Problem Scale (TEBPS) designed for the UAE by Hussien, Albaili and Sartawi (2014), and grounded on psychopathology research among children and adolescents. The TEBPS comprises 65 items on a 4- point rating scale (1= never, 4= almost always). The scale explored the following domains:

1- *Aggressive behavior*: verbal and physical threats.
2- *Misconduct*: property vandalism, rule violation.
3- *Learning problems:* disengagement, distractibility.
4- *Psychosomatic disorders:* sensitivity to physical discomfort, irritability.
5- *Hyperactivity*: impulsiveness.
6- *Anxiety:* fear, worry and stress.

The study demonstrates that students with low academic performance displayed higher emotional and behavioral problems than their better achieving peers. Consequently, emotional and behavior problems interfere negatively with academic attainment.

2.8 Substandard academic performance in the UAE.

Despite the governments' generous expenditure allocation to the education sector, and its dedication to reforming the education system in the UAE, the quality of the K-12 education system is still below international standards. Key issues are under qualified teachers and a lack of up to date curricula, especially in national public schools. Parents are seeking private education for their children and the

private sector is growing. In 2010 the private K-12 enrolment rate reached (64%), the highest among GCC countries (Mena Education Report 2013).The government aspires for a first-rate education system targeting several critical indicators that necessitate attention and improvement.

Indicator	Target
- Average PISA score.	- Among the top (20) countries.
- Average TIMSS score.	- Among the top (15) countries.
- Upper Secondary graduation rate.	- (90%).
- Enrollment rate in preschools.	- (95%).
- Percentage of students with high skills in Arabic.	- UAENAP 90%
- Percentage of schools with high quality teachers.	- (100%).
- Percentage of schools with effective leadership.	- (100%).
- Enrollment rate in foundation year prior to university.	- (0%).

Table (1) First-rate Education System (UAE Vision 2021)

2.8.1 UAE's education system

The UAE was founded in 1971, although its education system is relatively new, it has been the government's priority to gain from international advancements and research. The UAE offers nationals a free public education from Kindergarten through University. However, according to the National Bureau of statistics (Mullis et al. 2012) nationals account for approximately 11.5% of the population, expatriates are the sweeping majority (88.5%). Non-nationals do not have access to public education; hence they resort to private education. Private schools in the UAE are 3 types: National Private Schools, Foreign Private Schools, and Foreign Community Schools. The government has decentralized authority in the education sector. The three major authorities working to advance the education system are: the Ministry which governs the Northern Emirates, Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) and Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). School is not compulsory at every level, though the government is working to change that. The schooling system is structured into 3

stages: Kindergarten (3 to 5 years) is non-compulsory, the basic stage (grades 1 to 9) is compulsory, and the secondary stage (grades 10 to 12) is also non-compulsory (Mullis et al. 2012)

2.8.2 Indications of standardized testing

At the local level, The Ministry of Education has adopted the National Assessment Program (UAENAP) to track student's performance in the core subjects: Arabic, English, Math and Science. Data from UAENAP will be used to inform decision making concerning the curriculum, teacher development and student achievement. Results have unveiled areas for improvement. Students writing skills are sub average in both Arabic and English, whereas their reading skills are above average in Arabic and English. Mathematics and Science skills are at an average level (Ahmad, 2011). Overall, boy's performance is lower than girl's performance (Egbert, 2012). Swan (2013) reports that upon entry to University citizens must sit for the Common Educational Proficiency Examination (CEPA). Students who obtain a score between 150 – 180 points have to take a remedial program for a year before they are eligible to resume university study. The mean score for applicants this year is (163.5) in English. Similarly, mathematics skills are deficient, even in basic computation. Measuring students' performance according to national standards is a fundamental step in foreplanning and accountability. However, national standards alone do not suffice to set the stage for success. In a highly globalized World, it is necessary to evaluate how education systems thrive on internationally comparable scales.

On an international level, the UAE has participated in the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS 2011) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011). TIMSS is conducted every 4 years for students in grades 4 and 8 and PIRLS every 5 years for 4^{th} graders. 6443 fourth grade students and 5571 eighth grade students undertook the exams. Unfortunately, UAE pupils obtained below average scores in Math, Science and Reading respectively. The international average is 500 points, fourth graders scored 434 in Math, 428 in Science and 439 in Reading Literacy, eighth graders scored 456 in Math, and 465 in Science. The poorest performing curriculum was the Ministry of Education's Public and Private curriculum (Dubai TIMSS and PIRLS 2011 Report).

In 2012, 11500 students participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that takes place every 3 years to assess the skills of 15 year old pupils in Math, Science, reading and problem solving. In addition, PISA gathers background information on contextual variables affecting the learning process to provide a comprehensive report. Results have improved since 2009, but they are still below average, which is 500 points. Students scored 434 in Math, 448 in Science, 442 in Reading and 411 in Problem solving, with females outperforming males by 56 points (PISA 2012 Results). Critics questioned who is to be held accountable for the low achieving 54% of students in PISA (Dubai Chronicle, April 2, 2014).

2.8.3 The distracted pupil

As the dominance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is only expected to increase in the following years, and become profusely entangled with learning, what consequences does such a reality entail? Many studies attest to the benefits of integrating (ICT) devices in education, especially in providing access to the unprecedented wealth of content on the worldwide web. Carefully planned incorporation of ICT in the classroom is surely productive (Robledo, 2012; Elston, 2013). Nevertheless, Goundar (2014) cites empirical evidence that ICT devices are in fact a distraction. Students admitted using ICT devices for irrelevant purposes inside the classroom. Uses such as texting, checking emails and social media accounts, as well as online shopping are amongst the most popular (Bergen, Grimes and Potter, 2005; Carr, 2010; Hembrooke and Gay, 2003, cited in Goundar, 2014). Data from a survey assessing the attitudes of teachers around the world towards technology in the classroom stated that 76% of respondents found it difficult to suppress students from engaging in off task uses, primarily social networking (Elston, 2013). Beland and Murply (2015) investigated the consequences of mobile phone devices in schools in England on student achievement. Their findings demonstrated that schools which introduced a mobile phone ban showed better student productivity. Improved outcomes were significant for low achievers, but insignificant for high achievers. The issue of ICT intrusion transcends classroom boundaries. 99% of UAE residents own mobile phones and 63% of households have access to the web (Gulf News, February 3, 2016). Parents complain of their children’s attitude towards completing homework assignments as they are more interested in pursuing

other ends that don't require cognitive exertion and are seen as more pleasurable. While learners do benefit from software integration into education, extraneous employability of ICT devices remains a disturbing issue to parents and teachers.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The current study is constructed to probe the phenomenon of LH in the academic context of the UAE. LH is a complex issue of manifold interpretations that does not lend itself easily to one form of assessment, as previously exemplified in the Literature Review section.

3.1 Research design

The researcher targets the criteria underpinning the study's main questions which seek to create a holistic account of LH from a number of struggling students seeking an education in a private school in Sharjah. Therefore, the chosen strategy is a case study, which uniquely envelopes the participants, the site and the phenomenon, defined by Yin as a, "Strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (1981; 1994 cited in Robson, 2002, p.178). A case study may be exploratory or confirmatory depending on its purpose. The intention of this current study is exploratory. Nonetheless, the findings which parallel the literature on LH are somewhat confirmatory (Robson, 2002).

The case study is a qualitative approach emerging from constructivist traditions of a notion of multiple perspectives which legitimizes a range of methodological approaches. This is further illustrated by Mason (2006) that a 'qualitatively driven' approach to mixing methods offers enormous potential for generating new ways of understanding the complexities and contexts of social experience, and for enhancing our capacities for social explanation and generalization" (p.10). Mason advocates the use of mixed methods and encourages researchers to think, 'outside the box'. Likewise, Creswell (2003) asserts that, "the situation today is less quantitative versus qualitative and how more research practices lie somewhere on a continuum between the two" (p.4).

In light of the above, quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were employed consecutively, defined by Creswell (2003) as a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, where the first stage of data collection is quantitative (document analysis and questionnaire) followed by the second stage of

qualitative data collection (semi-structured interviews). Triangulation adds value to the multiple methods approach, because it enhances the validity of the findings, a much sought – after gain. Validity is the credibility of the evidence on one hand, and the indication of the evidence on the other. Triangulating data sources solidifies research outcomes (Robson, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Mason, 2006).

3.2 Participant selection

The selection of Al-**** International School as the medium for this study emanated from several determining criteria:

1- It is a relatively large K-12 private school in Sharjah, with 2985 students enrolled in its classes for the academic year 2015-2016.
2- The school's establishment (1987) is comparably older than the majority of more recent private schools which proliferated during the last decade due to increasing demand for private education from nationals and expatriates (MENA Education Report, 2013).
3- It was rated 'highly effective' by the Academic Accreditation Committee (MOE 2012-2013) on the six focus areas which centered on the quality of learning and the overall well-being of the learner.
4- Students attending the school are mainly from Middle East countries; table -2- illustrates the dispersion of their nationalities.

Nationality	Percentage
Syrian	60%
Jordanian	10%
Palestinian	10%
Egyptian	6%
Emirati	4%
Other	10%

Table -2- Nationalities of students attending Al-** Int. School.**

The distribution of pupils among the three key stages is explained in table -3- below.

Stage	Number of students
• Kindergarten	32
• Basic/cycle 1 (grades 1 5)	876
• Basic/cycle 2 (grades 6 9)	1122
• Secondary (grades 10 12)	868
Total	**2985**

Table -3- Distribution of pupils among the 3 stages.

The school follows the curriculum of the Ministry of Education: exempting the English language subject from kindergarten to grade (9) where the school teaches a different curriculum (English World, MacMillan Publishing). The schools announced vision promises to be "An intriguing and empowering educational setting that equips a generation to have faith in their lord, to be proud of their identity, modernistic and effective in the nation's development".

The school's mission is detailed as follows, "We are committed to founding an appealing educational setting and enhancing it via applying comprehensive quality assurance standards in all fields of performance, as well as employing technology to ensure maximum inter communication for optimal learning; in addition to providing professional development programs for its staff and its gifted learners, while seeking to increase achievement levels under the umbrella of an effective partnership with parents and local community institutions".

Students from grade 7-8-9 (Basic/cycle 2) constituted the sampling frame for the study. Adolescents are not only vulnerable to social and emotional turbulence, but are mature enough to conceptualize and express their experiences (Cook and Cook, 2005; Bandura, 1997), thus they are eligible to partake in the self-report questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The sampling frame is the qualified population from which a sample is drawn (Robson 2002). Table -4- displays their distribution in grade and gender.

Grade	Boys	Girls	Total
7	155	122	277
8	154	146	300
9	172	129	301
Total	**481**	**397**	**878**

Table -4- Distribution of sampling frame by grade and gender.

The researcher opted for a purposive sampling strategy (Robson, 2002; Mack et al. 2005), therefore selecting participants according to a predetermined criterion that is mandated by the theoretical implications of the learned helplessness phenomenon characterized by; repeated exposure to failure that leads inclined individuals to learn that their effort will not produce the desired result, hence they stop trying to influence the outcome of a situation (Burns & Seligman 1991).The initial criterion is repeated failure which will be further documented in the data collection phase.

3.3 Data collection and instrumentation

In November 2015, the researcher met with the vice-principal of the school to explain the topic and target of the research. A formal letter issued by the British University in Dubai clarifying the purely academic objective of the research was presented and photocopied for archival purposes. Several days later, a meeting with the head of the IT department was arranged. The researcher guaranteed the confidentiality of the documents entrusted to the research's benefit, and explained that a coding system would be used to substitute the pupils' names to ensure anonymity. Since, the retrieval of students' achievement records is a highly sensitive issue; the Head of the IT department secured the permission of the school principal and head owners of the school prior to the delivery of the records. The researcher discussed which students would be considered, 'repeatedly failing' with the vice-principal, and both consented that students scoring less than or equal to sixty percent would be identified as the struggling cohort. After careful examination of the achievement records, the school selected several teachers to explain to the students the purpose of the questionnaire and to collect the questionnaires

upon completion. The questionnaires were distributed to the students and returned during the second week of December. Semi-structured interviews were arranged with the teachers and supervisors throughout the month of January, accommodating their busy schedules, and students were interviewed on a prescheduled date in the second week of February, in the school's library hall.

3.3.1 Student's achievement records (document analysis)

To obtain preliminary data on the students' performance, a detailed record that included test scores in the four core subjects: Arabic, English, Math and Science were examined. The records for the Academic year 2014-2015 were used to track students' progress in the final exam of the first term, followed by the third term. The achievement records are a *primary inadvertent source* of data, explained by Bell (2005) as the documents, "which are used by the researcher for another purpose other than that for which they were originally intended" (p.126). The intention of the study is to probe for the probability of students at risk of learned helplessness by examining whether the progress of students continues to be substandard or stagnant.

3.3.2 Self-report questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed to explore student's perspectives on their learning outcomes and their behavior towards managing their learning outcomes. After students scores were analyzed, the names of selected students were substituted by a *confidential unique identifier* (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2009) (e.g. 7B12: grade 7, boy, 12th on the list). The identifier was written on the questionnaire, each questionnaire addressed the particular subject that the participant was struggling in. The questionnaire was based on the CCQ model (Appendix A) which was developed and tested by Schroder and Ollis (2013). The questionnaire comprises 12 items with the aim of probing reactions in hypothetical situations to assess the degree of helplessness in 2224 undergraduate students in Utah State University. The CCQ showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .90), and its unidimensionality was verified by the results of factor analysis. The CCQ is a modified version of the ASQ (Peterson et al. 1982) which is based on 12 hypothetical events assessing the attributional style of (130) undergraduate students enrolled at the State University of New York (Appendix B). However, both the CCQ and the

ASQ were aimed at college-level students, and both questionnaires contained general occurring situations, non-specific to school. The current questionnaire was aimed at the intermediate (middle school) level, although consistent with the 'self-report in hypothetical situations' format, it was altered to address school-specific situations, and worded to address a much younger audience. The final questionnaire (Appendix D) comprised 9 items, 7 close-ended questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) and 2 open-ended questions. The questions were designated to elicit possible explanations to the three research questions depicted in the table below.

research question	questionnaire item
1- What is the relationship between learned helplessness and underachievement?	1 and 2
2- Is there an observable pattern of behavior that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
3- What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of learned helplessness?	8, 9

Table -5- Distribution of related questionnaire items to research question.

The self completion questionnaires took approximately (15) minutes to complete. The information on the front page explained the objective of the questionnaire, assured anonymity of the participant, and gave simple instructions. 67 Questionnaires were distributed and only 50 returned (7 questionnaires were misplaced by the school, and 10 questionnaires were not returned by students). The low response rate is a common problem, anticipated by scholars, with self completion questionnaires (Robson, 2002).

3.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews constitute the qualitative follow-up phase of the data collection. Mack et al. (2005) promote individual face-to-face interviews in cases where individual interpretations are sought and where personal testimonies are needed, they encourage the use of open - ended questions to elicit unstructured conversation. Researchers have unanimously stressed the requisite skills in a proficient

interviewer, namely establishing rapport and recognizing paralinguistic expressions particularly when the topic is sensitive (Mack et al. 2005; Creswell, 2003; Robson, 2002). Although interviews are difficult to analyze, they "can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses" (Bell 2005, p.157).

3.3.3.1 Interviews with academic personnel

In search of a holistic account of LH, multiple angles need to be deciphered and those involved in the teaching-learning process on a day to day basis are able to observe pupils' attitudes and reactions, and recognize deviant behaviour. Four class teachers, the academic supervisor, the English language coordinator, and the social counselor were interviewed; the table below summarizes participants' designated subjects, grades and years of experience respectively.

participant	Subject	Grade	years of experience
1)- Teacher	Arabic	9	26
2)- Teacher	Science	7	15
3)- Teacher	Math	7	17
4)- Teacher	English	8, 9	4
4)- Academic Supervisor	-	7, 8, 9	17
5)- Coordinator	English	1→ 9	15
6)- Social Counselor	-	7, 8, 9	6

Table -6- Academic personnel interviewees (background information).

The researcher opted for a semi-structured interview containing predetermined guiding questions (Robson 2002), because the interviewees may not familiar with the phenomenon of learned helplessness, which is a relatively new area of research in the Middle East and Gulf region. The purpose of the interview is to elicit information about the defects (emotional, cognitive and motivational) that LH entails in inclined pupils (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978), and about how these students are supported. Two different sets of open-ended questions were discussed, one set

with the teachers and another with the academic supervisor, the English language coordinator and social counselor.

3.3.3.2 Interviews with students

Following the analysis of the self-report questionnaire, six students were selected based on their responses to delve into the details of their struggle with achievement. The table below summarizes students' relevant information.

student code	Gender	grade	Subject
• 7G3	Female (G)	7	English
• 7B12	Male (B)	7	Math
• 8B36	Male (B)	8	English
• 8G25	Female (G)	8	Science
• 9G50	Female (G)	9	English
• 9B69	Male (B)	9	Arabic

Table -7- Student interviewees (relevant information).

Permission was sought from the interviewees to audio record the interview for later transcription. Students were interviewed in Arabic, their native language to facilitate communication, likewise the Math, Science and Arabic teachers and the social counselor were interviewed in Arabic. The recorded interviews were translated and transcribed emulating the model presented in Mack et al. (2005, p.47).

3.4 Piloting

Prior to the data collection stage, the self-report questionnaire was revised by two academic Supervisors and two teachers. One item (regarded as redundant) was omitted from the questionnaire (Appendix C). The teachers suggested translating the questionnaire into Arabic to facilitate comprehension despite the simplicity of the English wording. The academic supervisor for the Arabic language supervised and edited the translated questionnaire (Appendix E). The questionnaire was given

to several boys and girls, attending another school, at the intermediate level to check its readability (Appendix D).

Two colleagues (academic supervisors) were consulted on the guiding questions of the semi-structured interviews, and a mock interview was conducted. Piloting is necessary because it tests the compatibility of the research tools with the research questions allowing valuable adjustments to be made at a practical level (Creswell, 2003).

3.5 Data analysis

848 achievement records were manually examined. First term exam grades across the four core subjects were highlighted if they were less than or equal to 60 points (from 100), then third term exam grades were highlighted according to the same standard. Finally, students scoring ≥ 60% in both exams were selected and given a code.

first term	third term	both terms
141 (16.6%)	120 (14%)	67 (8%)
Total number of students = 848		

Table -8- Number of students scoring ≥ 60% in one of the 4 core subjects.

The questionnaire items were coded and tabulated into the computer to produce frequency distribution bar graphs representing the responses of the 50 subjects. The semi-structured interviews were open-coded and analyzed according to the constant comparison method (Dye et al. 2000).

3.6 Ethical considerations

The researcher took all viable measures to ensure the well-being of the participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and participation was voluntary (informed consent). The anonymity of identities was maintained throughout the course of this study, a highly critical concern communicated by the school authorities due to the sensitivity of the research topic on the one hand, and the disclosure of student's achievement records on the other. Deliberation was taken to incorporate the

3 core standards of participant respect, beneficence and justice that are sanctioned in the Belmont Report (1979 cited in Mack et al. 2005).

3.7 Limitations of the study

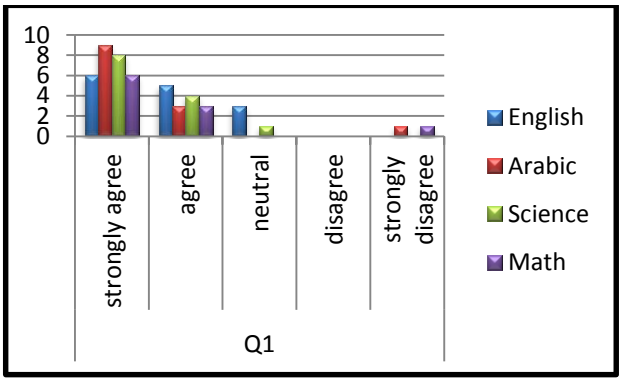
The study was undertaken in a single private school in Sharjah, without transcending it to explore other schools due to the hindrances of time and accessibility. The study focused on adolescents pertaining to grades 7, 8 and 9 and not the full cohort of students attending the school. Despite the ramified notion of underachievement, this research solely investigates the nature of the relationship between underachievement and learned helplessness discounting factors such as teacher quality, school facilities and other socio psychological effects on learning.

Chapter Four: Findings

This section commences by presenting the results of the quantitative data generated via the self-report questionnaire, followed by qualitative data from three sets of semi - structured interviews. The representation of the results is guided by the research questions for each instrument. The self-report questionnaire elicited responses from the fifty candidates whose achievement was examined over the lapse of one academic year and signified a struggle in one of the four core subjects. The questionnaire is a direct research approach that assesses participants' views, thoughts and feelings concerning a research topic (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2000; Beins, 2004).

4.1 Results from self-report questionnaires:

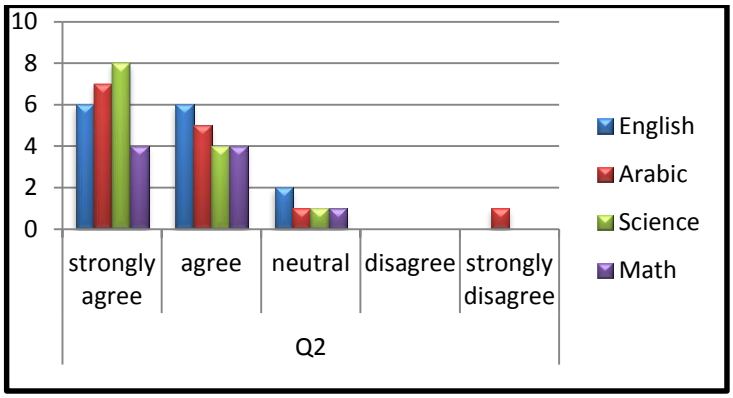
RQ1(What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?)



Q1					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	6	5	3		
Arabic	9	3			1
Science	8	4	1		
Math	6	3			1

Graph -1- (*Item 1: I believe that getting a better mark in 'subject name' is important).*

Item (1) elicits the attitude of the respondents towards the importance of improvement in the subject they are struggling in. The majority of students (88%) agreed with the statement, those who showed disagreement were a negligent 4 %, and only 8 % were undecided.



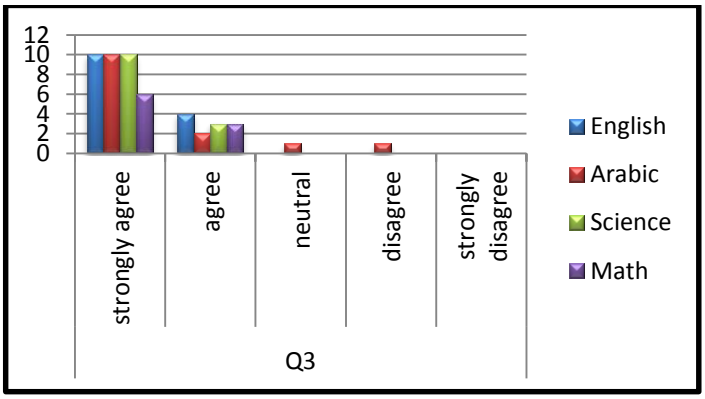
Q2					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	6	6	2		
Arabic	7	5	1		1
Science	8	4	1		
Math	4	4	1		

Graph -2- ***(Item 2: I believe that if I try harder in 'subject name', I will do better)*.**

Item (2) associates the belief that more effort will entail better results. Responses show that 88% agree with the statement, only 10% are undecided and 2% strongly disagree.

RQ 2 (Is there an observable pattern of behavior symptomatic of learned helpless students?)

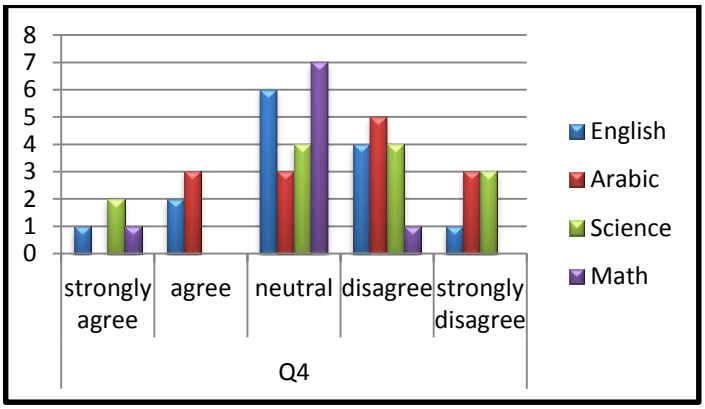
Items 3-7 explore students' behavior and reactions to different aspects of education, such as planning to work harder for an upcoming test, receiving a low score, in-class participation and accomplishing home assignments.



Q3					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	10	4			
Arabic	10	2	1	1	
Science	10	3			
Math	6	3			

Graph-3- ***(Item 3: When I receive a low or failing grade on a 'subject name' test, I plan to work harder next time).***

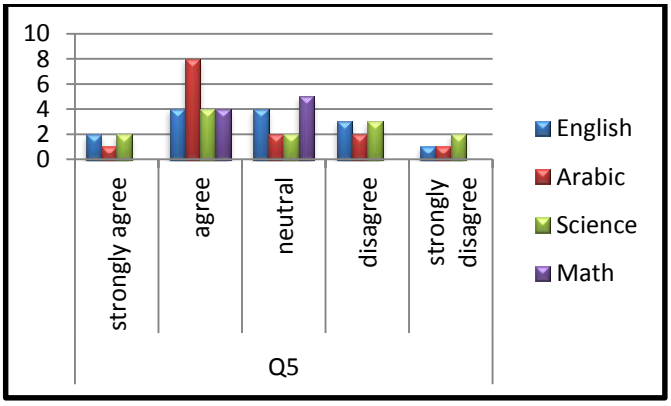
Item (3) inquires about students' determination to work harder for an upcoming test after receiving a substandard score. 96% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 2% were neutral, and the other 2% disagreed.



Q4					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	1	2	6	4	1
Arabic		3	3	5	3
Science	2		4	4	3
Math	1		7	1	

Graph -4- ***(Item 4: When I receive a low or failing grade on a 'subject name' test, I feel this is what I expected).***

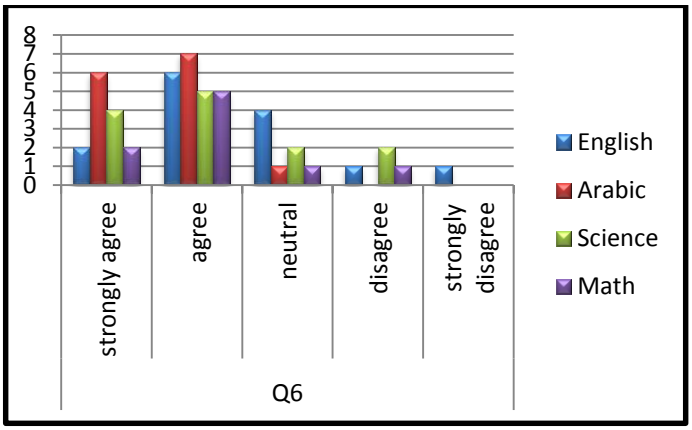
Item (4) explores the students' anticipation of low achievement. Only 18% agreed with the statement, 40% were neutral and 42% disagreed.



Q5					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	2	4	4	3	1
Arabic	1	8	2	2	1
Science	2	4	2	3	2
Math		4	5		

Graph -5- ***(Item 5: When the 'subject name' teacher asks questions in the class, I often participate in answering the questions).***

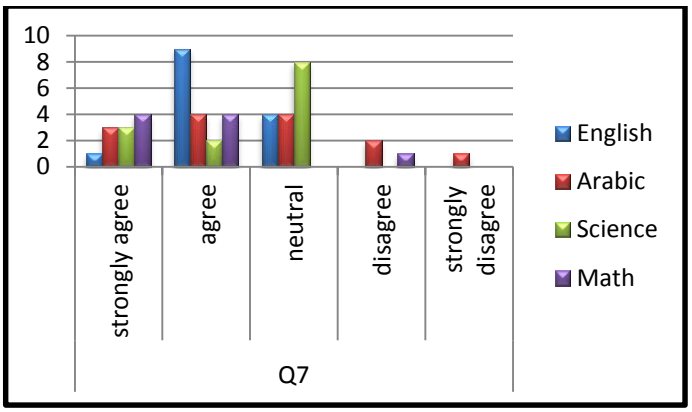
Item (5) elicits students' attitudes toward classroom participation. 50% of the respondents agreed that they often participate, while 26% were neutral, and the remaining 24% disagreed with the statement.



Q6					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	2	6	4	1	1
Arabic	6	7	1		
Science	4	5	2	2	
Math	2	5	1	1	

Graph -6- ***(Item 6: When I find difficulty understanding something in class, I often ask the teacher for help).***

Item (6) assesses student's initiative to ask for support upon encountering difficulties. 74% of the respondents agreed with the statement, 16% were neutral, and 10% showed disagreement.



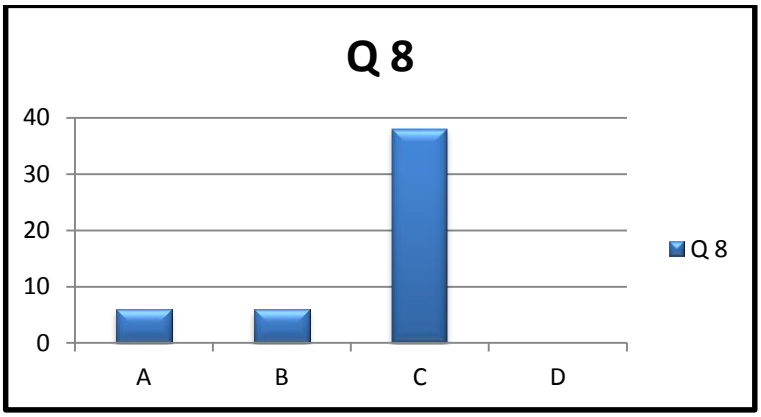
Q7					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English	1	9	4		
Arabic	3	4	4	2	1
Science	3	2	8		
Math	4	4		1	

Graph -7- ***(Item 7: When I am given homework or a project to complete at home, I spend a lot of time and effort on it).***

Item (7) examines whether enough time and effort is devoted to the completion of home assignments. 60% of respondents agreed that they spent a lot of time and effort on the completion of home assignments, while 32% were neutral, and the remaining 8% disagreed.

<u>RQ3 (What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?)</u>

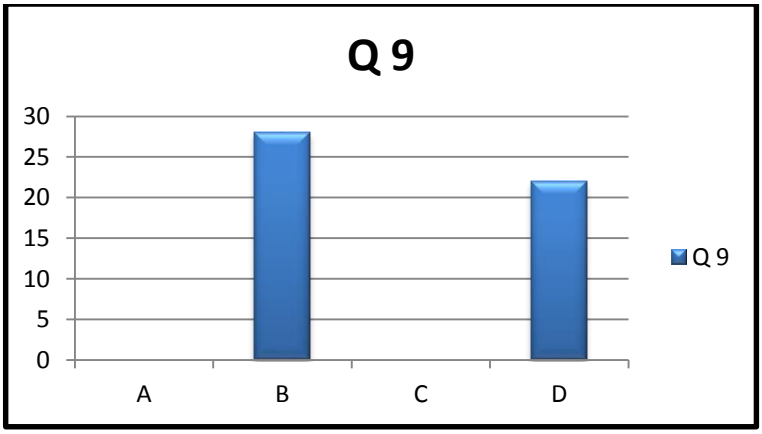
Items 8 and 9 probe the negative or positive involvement of significant adults in the student's life to determine the nature and source of support that underachievers require.



	A	B	C	D
Q8	6	6	38	

Graph -8- ***(Item 8: I feel that I am not doing well in this subject because….)***

Item (8) elicits the prime person that the student holds responsible for believing that s\he is not performing well in the specified subject. 12% of students selected "**A**": My teacher says I am not good at it, 12% as well selected "**B**": My parents say I am not good at it, and the majority of students (76%) opted for "**C**": I believe I am not good at it. Option "**D**" requested 'another reason' that the student may provide, students did not provide a reason of their own.



	A	B	C	D
Q9		28		22

Graph -9- ***(Item 9: If I have difficulties in 'subject name', I usually speak to ….)***

Item (9) explores the students' possible support source upon encountering difficulty in their academic studies. Option "**A**": The social counselor was not selected. However, 56% of the respondents selected "**B**": the teacher. Option "**C**": The supervisor was not selected, and the remaining 44% selected option "**D**": no one.

10					
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Q1	29	15	4		2
Q2	25	19	5		1
Q3	36	12	1	1	
Q4	4	5	20	14	7
Q5	5	20	13	8	4
Q6	14	23	8	4	1
Q7	11	19	16	3	1

Graph -10- Summary of responses to questionnaire *items 1-7*

Graph **-10-** above summarizes the responses of the (50) underachieving students in *items (1) through (7)* painting a contradictory picture to the theoretical underpinnings of LH, and inducing further enquiry into the details and value of the apparently optimistic responses. 86% of the respondents believe that obtaining a better mark in their poorly achieved subject area is important (**Q1**). Likewise 86% believe that they will perform better if they try harder in their poorly achieved subject area (**Q2**). The majority of respondents accounting for 96% agree that they plan to work harder for the next test when they receive a substandard grade (**Q3**). 40% were neutral and (42%) disagreed that a poor score on a test was expected (**Q4**). 50% viewed themselves as 'often participating' when the teacher asked questions, while the remaining 50% were neutral or disagreed with the statement (**Q5**). 74% of the students agreed that they often asked the teacher for help when they had difficulties (**Q6**). Finally 60% of the respondents agreed that they spent a lot of time and effort to accomplish home assignments and projects.

4.2 Results from student interviews

When a representative group of participants are asked the same questions, the resulting data can indicate similarities and differences in the attitudes of the population that the participants represent (Shaugnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2000). The qualitative data, the final phase of data

collection comprised a sequence of semi-structured interviews with students and educators (Appendices F, G, H). The students were purposefully selected following the analysis of their questionnaire responses. The intent of the interview was to give insight into the reasons underlying students' answers. Data was manually coded and aggregated from the transcripts; an inductive approach was used to determine emerging subthemes. Learned helplessness is experienced firsthand by students, it is hoped that their responses may shed light on its symptoms and manifestations. The following table portrays the students' responses in the self report questionnaire.

Questionnaire item									
Student	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
• 7G3	not sure	strongly disagree	agree	not sure	not sure	not sure	agree	Me	no one
• 7B12	strongly disagree	not sure	agree	strongly disagree	not sure	strongly disagree	disagree	Parents	no one
• 8G25	Agree	not sure	agree	not sure	disagree	disagree	agree	Me	no one
• 8B36	Agree	not sure	agree	not sure	strongly disagree	disagree	not sure	Teacher	no one
• 9G50	Agree	agree	agree	not sure	disagree	not sure	not sure	Me	no one
• 9B69	strongly agree	agree	not sure	not sure	agree	Agree	not sure	Teacher	no one

Table -9- Student interviewee's questionnaire responses

The following table clarifies the students' achievement scores during the first and final terms respectively.

Student	Subject	First term	Final term
• 7G3	English	54	50
• 7B12	Math	50	47
• 8G25	Science	44	47
• 8B36	English	48	46
• 9G50	English	58	54

• 9B69	Arabic	53	58

Table -10- Participants achievement scores (100 points)

RQ 1 (What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?).

For the first item, 4 of the students were in agreement with the belief that obtaining a better grade in the subject they are struggling in is important. When asked 'why' they believed it was important, several motives surfaced, like the joy of doing well (8B36, 8G25, 9B69). 8G25 thought it was also important to please her parents and for her future (line 4). 7G3 wasn't sure, but believed that doing well in English was because, "It's important for interacting with people" (line 8). 7B12 strongly disagreed with the statement because he believed Math was difficult (lines 3-5).

Responses for the second item fluctuated between agreement and uncertainty. 3 Students agreed that trying harder in their problematic subject area would entail a better result. 3 Students were uncertain that more effort would produce a better outcome. Student 7B12 asserted that it was, "Because I have tried a million times almost… I don't know if I get an equation like that, I don't know how to solve it" (lines 8-9), and 8G25 said that she studied "but to no avail" (lines 12-14). Student 8B36 wasn't sure because he didn't understand the meaning of the test questions (line 10). In addition, all 6 students admitted that they did not put in their best effort, their reasons were; the difficulty level of the subject (9G50, lines 8-14), tiredness (9B69, line 10), preference of another subject (8G25, line 16), and spending time on the mobile phone (7G3, lines 14-19).

RQ 2 (Is there on observable pattern of behavior symptomatic of learned helpless students?)

The majority of the students agreed with the *third statement*, that they planned to work harder for the next test after receiving a low or failing score. When the students were asked 'how' they planned to study, two common strategies emerged; reading and memorizing. 7B12 explains how he studies Math, "First I read everything, just reading, then I start from the beginning and try to memorize them… Meaning I memorize the rules" (lines 32-34). 7G3 replies that no one taught her how to study English,

and that all subjects are studied in the same way; she reads and tries to explain the lesson on her own (lines 27-30). 8G25 says that she studies for hours, staying away from her phone (lines 18-19), she studies all subjects in the same way, she elaborates that for science, "I read it, and then I try to recite it, but during the exam I forget what I memorized" (line 23). Student 9B69 depends on his mother, who reads and explains the lesson and asks him about everything, he sometimes studies alone, but finishes quickly and doesn't memorize a lot (lines 23-32). 9G50 also depends on memorization of English, she acknowledges that the English language should be studied differently, and gives a vague explanation that it is because the test is different and the language is different (lines 27-29).

For the *fourth item*, five students were uncertain that when they received a low test score, this was what they had expected. Students 9G50, 9B69 and 8G25 said that the score was always lower than what they had expected. 7B12 who strongly agreed with the statement explained that, "The feeling when I receive the grade is difficult and tense, and I had studied and feel that the questions were right… but in the end they turn out wrong. That hurts me so much, I think I'm concentrating and solving right… then it's all wrong" (lines 37-39). When the students were probed about their immediate reaction upon receiving a poor grade, students' responses showed that they reacted differently. 9G50 said that she was surprised and bothered (line 33), 8G25 said, "Sometimes I cry" (line 30). 8B36 said it was normal to him and that he was in the habit of getting such marks (line 29), but that he does get bothered when the score is very poor and tries not to show that he is bothered in front of people (lines 33and 55).

Item 5 (when the teacher asks questions in the class, I often participate in answering the questions) elicited various responses. 9G50 (line 38) and 7G3 (line 44) rated themselves as participating at the 'least' level among their classmates. 9B69 participates only when he knows the answer (line 42). Student 8G25 disagrees with the statement and considers her participation level at an average, while 7B12 admits that he participated at the beginning of the term and has started to withdraw with the passing of time (line 43).

Although responses to *item 6* (when I find difficulty understanding something in class, I often ask the teacher for help) were different, most of the students admitted that they actually did not resort to the teacher for help. Male students refrained from asking the teacher for fear of ridicule from peers (7B12

lines 48-49, 8B36 lines 48-54, 9B69 line 61). 7G3 doesn't ask the teacher unless she could not understand a concept by any means (lines 47-54), 9G50 feels more comfortable asking friends for help (lines 42-44), while 8G25 states, 'I feel like I'm wasting time when she explains to me… because I'm not going to benefit from it" (line 39).

Item 7 (When I am given homework or a project to complete at home, I spend a lot of time and effort on it) yielded different responses. 7B12 puts off difficult assignments till a later time (lines 64-65), 9G50 puts more effort into assignments of other subjects (line 49). 7G3 assured that she does put in her best effort, 8G25 as well puts in equal effort towards all subjects (line 42). 8B36 states that he puts in a lot of effort, but the teacher tells him, "It is wrong" (lines 59-61). Finally 9B69 depends on his siblings for help, "Well, I go home and tell them what I have, and they help me with my research and stuff. Even all of the research for National Studies, Geography and History, my siblings helped me" (lines 75-76).

RQ 3 (What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of Learned Helplessness?)

Item 8 (I feel that I am not doing well in this subject because…) yielded three different responses. 3 students selected, 'I believe I am not good at it', student 9G50 explained that she was experiencing difficulties because as a newcomer, studying in her home country was different (line 51), 8G25 attributed the reason to her memory, "I just forget really quickly. I memorize, repeatedly, but I'm going to forget" (line 44). 9B69 and 8B36 selected, "My teacher says I'm not good at it", 8B36 says "He yells at me in class" (line 67) and that he hasn't taught him another method of study (line 69). 7B12 selected, "My parents say I'm not good at it," he explained, "I feel there is something that is causing my grade to be low. My Mom and Dad tell me to improve myself… and I'm trying to improve… I read and memorize, but in the end, I don't know". (lines 76-78).

The student's responses were unanimous for *item 9* (If I have difficulties in 'subject name', I usually speak to…), they all selected 'no one'. Student 7B12 wasn't aware of the role or the person who was a social counselor in his department (lines 96-105). When the students were asked if they spoke to anyone else about their academic difficulties (other than the teacher, supervisor or social counselor),

7G3 and 8B36 insisted that they spoke to no one, 7B12 elaborated, "My classmates don't speak to me, and they don't sit next to me… I don't know what they don't like about me" (lines 85-88). 8G25 occasionally asks a friend, her Mother or Father (line 49), 9G50 also asks her friends. Student 9B69 says, "Sometimes when I try to talk, I feel it's not worth it, it's better to talk at home to someone" (line 101).

4.3 Results from teacher interviews

Prior to the initiation of the audio recorded interviews, the four teachers (English, Arabic, Science and Math) were briefed about LH. The concept was new to the teachers, they understood the term 'helplessness'(standing alone) to mean a person's inability to support him/herself or find means of support within him/herself or any other person, and the term 'learned' as synonymous to 'acquired'. In theory, the, 'acquisition process of helplessness' is not a conscious act, this point necessitated further clarification. The interview consisted of 5 guided questions that aimed at exposing the characteristics of LH prone individuals and exploring the available support measures in the school. Questions are listed in the table below.

Research Question	Interview Question
1-What is the relationship between underachievement and learned helplessness?	1-How would you describe the attitude or mindset of underachievers towards their studies?
2- Is there an observable behavior pattern symptomatic of learned helpless students?	2-a) How do you describe low achievers' participation in class? b) and completion of home assignments? 3- a) According to your observation, can you describe the behavior of low achievers after receiving a low or failing test score? b) Have you discussed with them the reasons for their behavior? 4- Do low achievers seek help from anyone?
3-What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?	5- What form of assistance or support programs are available to low achievers in the school?

Table -11- Teacher interview questions

RQ 1 (What is the relationship between underachievement and LH?)

Interview question 1: How would you describe the attitude or mindset of underachievers towards their studies?

The Science teacher responded optimistically that she believed that students were ambitious, and many would request a test repeat or an additional assignment to ameliorate the poor grade, this is because she believes both boys and girls enjoy Science (lines 33-34). The English teacher explained that low achievers were aware of their substandard performance, "And very few of them show readiness to make a change" (lines 25-26). Low achievers are divided into sets, according to the Math teacher; those who want to improve but do not attain desired results and those who have a negative reaction because they do not attain the desired results (lines 622-64). Uniformly, the Arabic teacher asserts, "… especially during the adolescent phase, where students are not fully aware or concerned about the significance of this subject. We see a lot of students who are helpless and unwilling to change or improve. This kind of thinking stems from the influence of the society that does not prioritize the Arabic language, because it's not a requirement for future studies" (lines 70-73).

RQ 2 (Is there an observable behavior pattern symptomatic of learned helpless students?)

Interview question 2: a) How would you describe low achievers participation in class? b) and their completion of home given assignments?

The teachers mentioned that low achievers' participation in class is very limited (English teacher: lines 2-3, Math teacher: lines 7-8, Arabic teacher: lines 5-7). "The other type… you find… have no intent to participate; they are sitting in a state of laziness, distant, careless and completely off task" (Math teacher: lines 5-6). In addition to lacking initiative, they often avoided challenging situations (Arabic teacher: lines 5-7). The Arabic and the Math teacher (lines 14 -15, lines 7-8) both noted that the level of difficulty played a role in the participation of low achievers. The Math teacher emphasized the sensitivity of transforming from childhood to adolescence, where new found interests distract students from their studies. She also holds parents responsible for the excessive provision and open access to means of entertainment, stating that many students stay up to a late hour in the night and have trouble

concentrating in class, "Because they have access to mobile phones and are awake in bed! The parents need awareness on this matter" (lines 98-99).

Interview question 3: a) According to your observation, can you describe the behavior of underachievers' after receiving a low or failing test score ? b) Have you discussed with them the reasons for their behavior?

The English teacher clarified, "Actually, it's nothing more than a feeling of a little depression which vanishes very fast" (line 6), she explains that when she discusses the issue with them, she notices signs of low self-esteem, "They are in an advanced stage, since I'm teaching eighth and ninth graders, they don't have the willingness to push themselves to the limits" (lines 8-10). The Math teacher distinguished between three different cases; concerned students with weak abilities who persist but are unable to attain satisfactory results, unconcerned students with concerned parents who provide support and are either unsuccessful or are able to, "…reach the minimum passing level only" (line 22). The third type, "… are helpless, they are not willing to respond, and neither are their parents" (lines 22-23). The Math teacher believes seventh graders to be more child-like, and prefers to discuss the matter with the parents. Although she tries several methods of communication (homework diary, telephone calls, parent-teacher meetings), some parents do not respond (lines 27-33). The Arabic teacher reported two types of reaction; the first type are students who are aware that they are falling short, and request a support strategy from the teacher, "They try it for a while, then abandon it because they have too much work pressure from other subjects, or they are not finding the support and encouragement they need from their families, or the teacher may not give the student the required attention" (lines 28-31). The second type of students are apathetic, they have become used to successive disappointments (lines 20-23) "… some of these students believe that since Arabic is an accumulative subject, they cannot make up for the lost concepts, they cannot adjust their level and be on par with peers, so they leave the issue out of despair" (lines 28-31).The Science teacher replied that, "They are bothered; many become teary-eyed, especially when they see their classmates receive high scores" (line 12), the main reason is that they were nervous and failed to recall requisite information, "of course sometimes this is true, and sometimes it's an excuse to cover up their lack of persistence. I have to know my student well, and look into the reason behind the poor score…" (lines 14-16).

Interview question 4: Do low achievers seek help from anyone?

The Science teacher confirmed that most students do request help from her, except those who shy away because of their classmate's comments (lines 29-30). The English and Math teacher observed that low achievers resorted to their friends for help and rarely asked the teacher because they were apathetic, "Sometimes it's indifference, and sometimes the students has reached a point where they feel they don't understand and won't understand" (Math teacher: lines 43-46). The Arabic teacher reported that only a small number requested help, although teachers prescribe weekly tasks, success is dependent on the student's determination, and the teacher's follow-up strategy. "Also, there is a psychological factor in the mix, if the student likes the subject and likes the teacher, s/he will be encouraged to work harder, contrary to the situation where the teacher may be discouraging the student" (lines 40-45).

Interview question 5: What form of assistance, or support programs are available to low achievers in the school?

The teachers reported that the main responsibility of providing support to low achievers was left to them. The English teacher seats low achieving students next to their high achieving classmates, she believes this technique improves their performance, engages them in group work, and boosts their self-esteem and their social relationships (lines 16-18). The Math teacher provides them with simplified worksheets at one or two levels below the student's current level, starting at simple computations, "… so that they regain self-confidence, in hope that they will like the subject" (lines 48-54). The Arabic teacher explained that specialized support is based on the remedial plans that the teacher prepares, "But only few of these plans are executed, because delivering the required syllabus consumes too much time, and little is left for other plans" (lines 60-62). The Science teacher believes that the teacher, "… should find time to work on weaker skills and lessons within the class schedule. English and Arabic are accumulative subjects, meaning that courses can be given to address basic skills or missed information that is not the case for Science." (lines 24-27). As for professional support programs outside the classroom, there are no available programs addressing Math and Science. However, the case for the languages is different, students are grouped according to their abilities, and the assistance programs

focus on the general skills lacking in a group, they are not tailored to individual needs of specific students, therefore the parents are advised to register their children in support centers outside of the school during the holidays (English teacher: lines 21-22). Similarly, the Arabic teacher explains that individual, intensive and long term programs that are not available in the school require attention and cooperation from the parents to be productive (lines 65-68).

4.4 Results from Supervisor interviews

The set of guided questions for the academic supervisor (grades 7, 8, 9), the social counselor and the English language coordinator was designated to address the first and third research questions of this study, the second question was discussed in details with the students and teachers. Table -12- lists the interview questions.

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1-What is the relationship between underachievement and LH?	1- a) Do you consider underachievement to be a problem? b) Why / Why not? 2- What measures do you propose should be implemented with students that have failed repeatedly?
3- What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?	3- What form of assistance or support programs is available to underachievers in the school? 4- a) Do you think assistance programs will help raise student achievement? b) If yes, in what way? 5- Whose responsibility is it to detect if low achievement is related to ability, motivation or helplessness?

Table -12- Supervisor interview questions

<u>RQ 1 (What is the relationship between under achievement and LH?)</u>

Interview question 1: Do you consider underachievement to be a problem? (Why/Why not?).

The academic supervisor believed that it was certainly a problem for the students, their lack of ability, skills and motivation are the reasons why they are slow learners and unable to keep up with their classmates (lines 11-13), she adds, "low achieving students effect the academic level of the school in general, and the level of their class in particular" (lines 10-11). The English language coordinator also believes low achievement to be a problem when the student doesn't benefit from the support programs, and refuses to work on him/herself outside of school, this negligence on the part of the parent and the student will lead to a grade defect in the secondary stage and a discrepancy between the actual level of the student and the level of his studies (lines 33-40). This lack of proficiency in the English language can obstruct future studies, as university admittance relies on solid language skills in IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) (lines 36-38). The social counselor believed that the problem of underachievement was mainly due to time mismanagement, she observed that students in this age group studied for approximately 2 to 3 hours a day and spent most of their time on social media (lines 47-49).

Interview question 2: What measures do you propose should be implemented with students that have failed repeatedly?

The academic supervisor replied that it was the responsibility of educators to look into the matter to find a solution, "But first, we have to encourage them and push them to succeed, at least with the lowest average, then we look into their answer papers and try to solve the problem" (lines 18-20). The English language coordinator believed that students should be informed that they have an issue to deal with, then after completing a diagnostic test, they are assigned to an assistance program in the school (lines 69-71). The social counselor explains that the procedure in the school usually starts from the teacher informing her of the names of students; in some cases the parents are contacted. The teacher cooperates at the academic level by simplifying explanations and providing worksheets and the social counselor works at the psychological level by evaluating the home situation to see if there is an issue that is interfering with the student's studies, she communicates with the students, after establishing rapport to promote awareness of the significance of their studies and the disadvantages of being neglectful (lines 13-21).

RQ 3: (What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?)

Interview question 3: What form of assistance or support programs are available to low achievers?

The teachers are required to identify the struggling students and design a remedial plan, while the social counselor consults with the student and parents to determine the socio-psychological issue that underlies their underachievement (social counselor: lines 30-31). The academic supervisor confirms that there are academic support programs for low achievers in English and Arabic (lines 2-3). The students that qualify for these courses are, "Slow learners, and students who have physical, mental, psychological or social problems that prevent them from studying well…." (lines 5-6)The English language coordinator details three different programs; after students are classified to levels following a diagnostic test and other evaluation tests, they are assigned to one of these programs, "The early-morning program is for those who need a little help and motivation… extra practice and reinforcement" (lines 15-16). The after school program is for students who require more support, "They need support in doing homework and revision of lessons taken or revision of previous knowledge" (lines 17-18). "For the Saturday program, which is intensive, it is for students who can't come to the after-school program, this is first, and it is for students whose achievement is the lowest, around 25 to 35 out of 100, have everything is included, even going back to the alphabet, to basic vocabulary" (lines 18-20).

Interview question 4: a) Do you think assistance programs will help raise students achievement? b) If yes, in what way?

From his observation of a positive outcome, the English language coordinator stated, "When we talk about the level of a student… We mean the scores on an exam… It will also affect his participation in class, his friends, his confidence in the class will be much higher… and teachers will notice the improvement, this will increase his motivation. It varies, of course, from one student to another, some cases we have encountered don't respond, they lack motivation because they had no significant improvement" (lines 74-80).The academic supervisor consents and clarifies that achievement is boosted because support programs repeat information and enable the teacher to plan and concentrate on a smaller set of students and students themselves will have a better chance at participation. She believes

that students who are unwilling to attempt to improve themselves are those that do not benefit from the support programs (lines 22-28). The social counselor also believes that there are students who show improvement and some who don't. Those who do not improve either have a low IQ or their parents are unsupportive at home (lines 2-7).

Interview question 5: Whose responsibility is it to detect if low achievement is related to ability, motivation or helplessness?

The teacher is the one who spends the most time with the students, after s/he identifies the struggling students, the social counselor probes about the reason (social counselor: lines 60-62). The process begins by examining the student's achievement records over the years, to see if the level was constant. Also, home circumstances are considered because situations such as parent separation can interfere with studies (lines 14-16), " the social media, this is their main interest, it's relatively new, for about 5 years now, ever since What's app, Facebook, and Twitter came into being; all this affects their studying" (lines33-34). She explains that parents are unaware of the distraction that unconstrained access to social media has on students' concentration and motivation to study. "This is the main obstacle that stands in the way of both the student and the teacher" (lines 51- 54). The social counselor believes that an awareness campaign on the characteristics of adolescence and how to develop through this phase safely is sufficient (lines 41-44).The academic supervisor generalizes that this is the responsibility of the home and the school alike (lines 15-16). The English language coordinator admits that even though all parties in the school have a role in determining the nature of underachievement, "But it's not always possible to go through that criteria in most of the schools, and particularly in our school…" (lines 62-63). He believes that it is largely the responsibility of the teacher who is evaluating and observing the student in class, then both the social specialist and academic coordinator should work together to unravel the reason and prescribe support (lines 58-62). The table below summarizes the emergent themes from the interview data.

Research Question	Student interview themes	Teacher interview themes	Supervisor interview themes
1- What is the relationship between underachievement and LH?	- believe in the significance of good academic achievement -do not put in their best effort	-students' unwillingness to improve (weak abilities, lack of awareness, successive disappointments)	- underachievers undermine school and class level -underachievement is detrimental to future studies - involvement of all stakeholders to support underachievers
2- Is there an observable pattern of behavior that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?	- Use of ineffective study strategies - do not request help from teachers(fear of peer ridicule) - bothered when they receive low grades - low participation rate	- limited class participation (challenge avoidance, apathy) -concerned: but needing additional home/school support -Indifferent: due to repeated failure experiences - disinterested: access to digital entertainment devices -poor study strategies (test anxiety) - teacher's help rarely requested (embarrassment, apathy)	
3-What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?	-belief in inefficacy enforced by self, teacher, parents -problem is unaddressed at school	- Teacher's responsibility to identify and plan for underachievers -lack of time for individual attention and support	- Support programs affect student and achievement positively - social counseling provides socio- psychological support -unresponsive students : week abilities, unsupportive home environment - awareness needed for parents: characteristics of adolescence, restricting access to social media

Table -13- Emergent themes from interview data

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Theoretically, LH is grounded in cognitive theory, the individual construction of meaning inherent in human cognition influences behavior and emotion (Bandura, 1997; Clark et al. 1999). LH is triggered through the lens of neurobiology in predisposed individuals with distinctive congenital cortical structures and mechanisms (Shumake and Gonzalez-Lima, 2003; Maier and Watkins, 2005; Salomons et al. 2012). LH is a disorder that entails cognitive, emotional and behavioral defects when an individual experiences repeated disappointments and perceives his/her inability to control the outcome (Hiroto, 1974; Abramson et al. 1978; Seligman et al. 1984, Maier et al. 2000).

As students progress through their academic career, challenges are inevitable at every evaluation point. The satisfaction of success and the distress of failure are learned early on, and both imprint strongly on a person's character, conduct and outlook in life (Jersild, 1959; Bandura, 1997). Recurring underachievement is experienced by many students; it is exaggerated by the interplay of multiple causes to the extent that it becomes a long-lived insurmountable problem. Decidedly, students come to realize this reality; they lose faith in the possibility of progress, and settle in a state of stagnation and withdrawal, thus jeopardizing their educational and occupational future (Feinstein, 2003; Ahmed, 2011; Swan, 2013). The extensive literature on underachievement explores and exposes its potential causes and ramifications (Ramey and Ramey, 2002; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; Afzal et al. 2010). It is hoped that this study will add to the existing literature and clarify the association of LH with underachievement.

This investigation is founded on three questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?

RQ2: Is there an observable behavior pattern that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?

RQ3: What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?

The study attempted to encapsulate the experiences and viewpoints of a selection of students, teachers and supervisors on the struggle with LH, by incorporating a mixed-methods approach and utilizing quantitative and qualitative instruments to document LH from supplementary angles (Robson, 2002; Mason, 2006). The target population was adolescent students representing the age group of 12 to 15 years, and pertaining to grades 7, 8 and 9. Achievement records were analyzed based on the criterion of repeated underachievement in one of the four core subjects. The 50 underachievers responded to a self-report questionnaire, following its analysis, 6 students were selected for interviews, the teachers and supervisors of levels 7, 8 and 9 were interviewed as well.

Despite the merits of employing a questionnaire to illicit data on people's attitudes and beliefs (Robson, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Bell, 2005), researchers are cautioned that, "on the surface, survey research is deceptively simple" (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2000, p.146). They need to be alert that the generated data is not as straight forward as it may seem. Beins (2004) warns that respondents are biased towards responses that convey a favorable impression of themselves; this is defined as social desirability, a force that induces individuals to respond according to acceptable social norms and not as they sincerely believe, particularly if they feel their responses are recorded or may be consequential (Shaugnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2000). The questionnaire in this study yielded responses that were evidently inconsistent with the literature on LH and underachievement, and contradictory to the responses of interviewed students, teachers and supervisors. Responses to questionnaire items 1 to 4 and 6 and 7 that convey a positive image may indicate social desirability bias, especially as social acceptance surfaces in adolescence, and increased awareness to social and communal convention and beliefs are a developmental characteristic of this stage (Bandura, 1997; Cook and Cook, 2005).The following is a discussion of the major research findings in relation to global literature on LH.

5.2 **RQ1:** What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?

5.2.1 Low self –esteem and inefficacy beliefs

Although students unanimously agreed that improving their achievement results was important for their future, to please their parents, and for the joy of success per se, they all confessed that they did not put in their best effort. They felt that their effort was misplaced either because of the difficulty level of the subject, or because of unproductive trials. Schroder and Ollis (2013) observed that LH prone individuals often avoided challenging situations and withdrew effort upon encountering difficulties (Sorrenti et al. 2014; Yates, 2009). Students recognized the cause-effect relationship between exerting effort to improve achievement as McDowell (2009) observed. However upon further inquiry, half of the students doubted their abilities (7B12, 8G25, 8B36) to influence their achievement (Walling and Martinek, 1995; Yates, 2009). Distrust in ones abilities is a sign of lowered self-esteem which relates to attributing helplessness to internal reasons such as the self (Abramson et al. 1978; Maier et al. 2000).

5.2.2 Social rejection

Teachers and supervisors agreed that recurrent underachievement was detrimental to the student on more than the academic level. Underachievement is a societal stigma, it is heightened in a classroom environment that permits negative competitiveness and comparisons, such as norm-referenced grading systems and ability groupings (Schunk and Pajares 2002). 7B12 complains, “My classmates don’t speak to me, and they don’t sit next to me, I don’t know what they don’t like about me” (lines 85-88). The three interviewed boys expressed embarrassment and fear of peer ridicule as the main reason for not requesting clarifications or support from the teacher. The Science teacher asserts that students are bothered when they receive poor grades, “Many become teary-eyed, especially when they see their classmates receive high scores” (line 12). The English teacher alluded to agreeableness, a personality trait that indicates prospective responsiveness of underachievers. She states that, “Students who have a good character, they are likeable, liked by their teacher and classmates, even if they are not that good academically, yeah, I think they will improve” (lines 41-43). This is in line with Hsu’s study (2011) that associated the neuroticism trait to LH susceptibility; these individuals are sensitive to failure and

are emotionally unstable due to the provocation of anger, sadness and embarrassment, contrary to students that possess the agreeableness trait. Furthermore, low academic performance is linked to increased distractibility, rule violation and aggressiveness (Hussein and Albaili 2014), which in turn induces intolerance from teachers and peers. Social rejection that is echoed in several studies, is an unfortunate consequence of underachievement that only aggravates LH in susceptible students (Jirsild, 1959; Bandura, 1997).

5.2.3Future at risk

Another detriment to recurrent failure experiences is the extrapolation of expected failure to other life situations; this is the risk of "global attribution" that resonates in the teachers' frequent allusions to their students 'unwillingness' and 'indifference' in various situations (evaluations, homework, class participation, support programs). With the responsibility of life changing decisions weighing on their shoulders, these students abandon opportunities based on their conviction of a disappointing outcome (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978). LH is academically debilitating, it diminishes students' motivation to study and seek help when it is necessary (Afzal et al. 2010). As the school terms pass by, the student's performance will withdraw as the material becomes more advanced or stagnate at a sub-average level, which was evident in the analysis of the achievement records by comparing first term to third term results. The Math teacher reports that, "Sometimes, the students have reached a point where they feel they don't understand and won't understand" (lines 45-46). When nothing is done to address the situation, the English language coordinator warns that students will end up with a grade defect and will no longer be on par with classmates (lines 33-40). The Arabic teacher explicates that the relationship between underachievement and diminished effort is reciprocal, "It seems like a two way effect, especially in language acquisition, because it is acquired effectively during the early years, this is the factor that enables continuous progress. If the student was below par in the early years, this is a factor that will impact the student's attitude, they will withdraw effort and cease trying. At the intermediate level, they will feel that the train has passed them by, and they will not be able to reach the requisite level…" (lines 53-58). This observation echoes Yates' longitudinal study which concludes that, "It is therefore likely that these achievement related behaviors influenced students' actual

achievement …, thus creating a vicious circle in which helplessness and lack of achievement were inextricably intertwined" (2009, p. 100).

5.3 RQ2: Is there an observable behavior pattern that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?

5.3.1 Apathy and disengagement:

Although the questionnaire responses indicated that students sought support from teachers upon encountering difficulties, responses of interviewed students were in sharp contrast, they admitted that they did not ask the teacher for help. Likewise, teachers distinguished between concerned underachievers and unconcerned underachievers, the latter were described as indifferent and lacking initiative, which is similar to Walling and Martinek's case study (1995) that deduced symptoms of LH to be low persistence and challenge avoidance. The students rated their class participation as less than average and reported that they did not address their underachievement issue with anyone in the school. Even though the students were bothered after receiving a poor test score, no further support measure was pursued. The teachers elaborated that even when support strategies were sought, they were abandoned too soon. (Arabic teacher, lines 28-31), the Math teacher observed that these students were distant and off-task inside the class (lines 5-6). Similar findings were reported by Yates (2009), and Sorrenti et al. (2014), adding proof to the hypothesized behavioral, motivational and emotional defects consequential of the LH syndrome.

5.3.2 Poor study strategies and test anxiety

The current study investigated LH in intermediate level students in grades 7, 8 and 9. Students at this stage are cognitively capable of deductive reasoning which is determined, according to Piaget, as their ability, "To systematically manipulate several variables, test their effects in a systematic way, and reach correct conclusions" (Cook and Cook 2005, p.19). Evidently, the six interviewed students were implementing ineffective study techniques, the students expressed their plans to study for an upcoming test by 'reading' and 'rote memorization'. The same strategy emanated for all 4 core subjects, the students were unaware of the pedagogical peculiarities of the different subjects. They attested to

procrastinating (item 7, 7B12), and overdependence on sibling-support (item 7,9B69) to complete home given assignments. McDowell (2009) and Sorrenti et al. (2014) observed that learned helpless students developed inadequate study strategies. Moreover, the Math teacher and the social counselor mentioned providing underachievers with supplementary and simplified worksheets as a mean for support. The teachers remarked that the intensive syllabus accompanied by time constraints prevented them from allocating attention and support to individuals, an obstacle that was articulated in Cassen and Kingdon (2007) and McDowell (2009). Test anxiety could be a manifestation of low self-esteem and ineffective study strategies. Students expressed their disappointment with their poor scores as they expect their answers to be accurate. Student 8G25 says she studies for an extended period of time, "But during the exam I forget what I memorized" (line 23). The Science teacher notes that nervousness is the main cause of their failure to recall requisite information (lines 14-16). Maier and Watkins (2005) and Seese et al. (2013) observed that uncontrollable stressors which induced a lasting state of anxiety were the consequence of neurobiological congenital proneness. The Science teacher noticed some students had trouble expressing their thoughts in writing, therefore written evaluations did not adequately reflect students' performance, and these students need to be trained by their teachers at test-taking strategies (lines 18-19). Student 7B12 expresses his frustration with tests as follows, "I study at home but when I come to solve in a test, I don't know what to do, and there are stuff I don't do… I don't know how to form equations…" (lines 8-9).

5.4 **RQ3:** What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?

5.4.1 Fortifying self –efficacy

Feelings of worthlessness and self blame surface upon exposure to failure. When students are shamed for their underachievement by parents and teachers, or ridiculed by peers, inefficacy is exacerbated. Bandura (1997) posits that the school atmosphere either nurtures or devalues self – efficacy. Embarrassment obstructs the learning process; students testified that they did not ask for help inside the class for fear of ridicule, and outside of class because they lacked initiative. While some students believed that *they* were not doing well in their subject area, others blamed *parents and teachers*. Student 8B36 blames his teacher who publicly reprimands him. Underachievement relegates students

to an emotionally vulnerable position; they are in need of empathy and encouragement. Erring is part of the learning process and should be treated and tolerated accordingly. Students are sensitive to the reaction of their teachers and classmates, the permissibility of public performance comparisons and ability groupings instigate inefficacy beliefs. Performance feedback is best delivered privately, with self-referenced progress under the criterion of 'added value'. Peer ridicule is unjustified and should be penalized (Walling and Martinek, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Schunk and Pajares, 2002). Self efficacy is boosted when students are taught to work towards proximal learning goals that convey a sense of accomplishment and success. Modeling skill application and having students emulate the sequence of steps enhances their confidence in their abilities (Schunk and Pajares, 2002).

5.4.2 Addressing underachievement at school

Underachievement is unanimously recognized as an issue with negative bearing on the students' welfare, however it is only partly addressed. The students spoke out that they did not address their underachievement problem with anyone. The Social counselor described her intervention as initiating after the teacher had identified the target students, an alternative identification strategy should be proposed such that students do not 'fall between the cracks' and miss out. It is viewed as the teacher's responsibility to lay out remedial plans for underachievers and follow-up on progress, nevertheless the school teachers refuted its feasibility under their given circumstances. Conditions such as lower pupil-teacher ratios, the supply of equipment, professional development that targets customized support techniques, alongside effective parental involvement, that are lacking in the school, only hamper support programs and place an additional burden on teachers (English teacher lines 31-33, Math teacher lines 71-74, Arabic teacher lines 60-62) (Walling and Martinek, 1995; Cassen and Kingdon, 2007; McDowell, 2009).

Foundational and remedial programs that addressed requisite skills for the Arabic and English subjects were rated as productive, the English language coordinator asserted that such programs increased students' class participation because their confidence was boosted, teachers and peers also notice their improvement which also increases their motivation (lines 74-80). The academic supervisor added that the programs enabled teachers to plan for and concentrate on a smaller set of students, which facilitated

their participation and interaction (lines 22-28). Similar support programs for Science and Math are necessary, the misconception that teachers and students have about support programs as only for catching up on missed information or extra skill practice (Arabic and English are considered as accumulative subjects) requires rectification. Support programs should equip students with adequate study strategies based on their learning styles and preferences. Analytical reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking need to be taught to replace rote memorization. Test-taking strategies such as breaking down the question, understanding terminology, planning and proof reading are also necessary to alleviate test anxiety.

Yates (2009) is concerned about detecting LH at the primary school level before it becomes entrenched in students' attitudes and behavior. The Science teacher strongly advocates early intervention stating that, "… a student shouldn't be exposed to repeated failure. The teacher should be alert to this from the first failing score… and should do something about it, the child at this stage shouldn't experience feelings of helplessness; the teacher should be at fault because it is (his)/her responsibility that the student was neglected… Many students are not up to the challenge; they need help from home and from school. I expect the teacher to be mainly responsible for (his)/her student's poor achievement. Of course we request the involvement of parents, but many of them are either too busy or unqualified to help" (lines 2-10)**.**

5.4.3Promoting a supportive home environment

"My Mom and Dad tell me to improve myself…I'm trying to improve… I read and memorize, but in the end, I don't know" (7B12 lines 76-78). Good intentions can go a long way if armed with awareness and perseverance. Furthermore, recurrent underachievement which predisposes students to LH can in fact be prevented from as early as infancy. The social counselor concludes that those who do not benefit from support either have a low IQ or unsupportive parents (lines 2-7). Therefore awareness is the key; parents need to be educated that intelligence is fostered at home even before school age, and that an infant's cognitive development is highly dependent on sufficient exposure to the developmental priming mechanisms cited in Ramey and Ramey (2002). Feinstein (2003) associated two prime influences on a child's academic incompetence, parents' socio-economic status and poor preschool

scores which necessitate effective early intervention and collaboration between the parents and the school. Awareness campaigns are critical to educate the ‘busy’ or ‘unqualified’ parent on several issues. Parents need to take part in their child’s education, by modeling perseverance and teaching problem solving strategies, also by consciously channeling feedback about their child’s performance to boost self-efficacy rather than undermine it. This is accomplished by setting attainable short-term goals, equipping the child with a strategy, then noting and praising progress (Schunk & Pajares 2002; Sylva et al. 2004). Parents need to understand that the social media and the internet are attractions that require low cognitive exertion and thus may become a serious addiction that distract children from purposeful aims such as their education. Hence, it is imperative to establish regulations to restrict time and audit program access and appropriateness. While adolescents are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, it is necessary to educate parents on the importance of maintaining a strong relationship that is grounded on trust, communication and guidance.

Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

In light of the RQs that explored aspects of the LH syndrome such as its relationship with underachievement, behavioral manifestations, and support options, the following recommendations are proposed.

RQ1: What is the relationship between LH and underachievement?

The relationship between underachievement and LH is a reciprocal cause-effect relationship. Combating underachievement is at the heart of educational reform in the UAE today, as international benchmarking assessments (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) and national standardized tests (CEPA, UAENAP) have contributed convincing evidence that underachievement is an intricate issue that is magnified when poor literacy, computational and problem solving skills become an unaddressed burden that the student struggles with year after year. Early detection permits early intervention; when LH is recognized as a debilitating disorder with emotional, behavioral and cognitive manifestations, LH prone students can benefit from support programs that address their emotional and motivational needs. It is imperative that academic accreditation committees evaluate underachievement detection and intervention plans with reference to standards such as the recognition of LH among other disorders that do not fall under the special needs spectrum, and how well are the teachers and assisting staff trained to cater for the needs of atypical students.

RQ2: Is there an observable behavior pattern that is symptomatic of learned helpless students?

Despite their wealth of experience and long teaching careers, the teachers and supervisors alike were unfamiliar with LH. Nonetheless, while inquiring about the behavior of underachievers, a pattern of symptomatic behavior was recognized and was congruent with the hypothesis and the literature. Therefore, a diagnostic checklist that includes LH symptoms will aid teachers and supervisors by

clarifying ‘what to look for’ in their pupils’ behavior (e.g. The Student Behavior Checklist cited in Yates 2009).

RQ3: What could be recommended to support students who are at risk of LH?

A comprehensive support system begins by battling inequality in education much before the preschool stage; it is not feasible to delve into such measures within the limited scope of this study. However, ensuring equal access to quality preschool education was proven to nurture cognitive competence and to avert LH in the years to follow. Parental awareness is much needed on the urgency of providing a rich and stimulating environment from birth, on modeling perseverance and teaching coping strategies. The school system plays a vital role in setting the stage for effective detection and intervention planning by:

- Promoting awareness on the topic of LH, and how to observe and treat relevant symptoms.
- Training teachers to instruct effective study and test-taking skills, to diagnose different learning profiles, and to customize lesson delivery and assessment for underachievers.
- Affording teachers the flexibility in time and syllabus to cater for the underachieving segment under their care.
- Encouraging productive parental involvement.

6.2 Conclusion:

The current exploratory case study examined LH as experienced by a group of intermediate-level underachieving adolescents in the setting of a private school in Sharjah. A mixed-methods approach was undertaken to triangulate and solidify data. The document analysis, questionnaire and interviews generated findings that were generally confirmatory to the hypothesis and literature on LH. Although LH is relatively new to the academic domain in the UAE, it is inextricably linked to underachievement. It is the researchers hope that this study will enlighten educators about underachieving pupils who are at risk of LH to detect and treat the symptoms before they become ingrained in attitudes and behavior, and before the detriment of LH extends to other life situations. Further research that is wider in scope is necessary to summon attention to critical aspects such as Attributional Retraining (AR),

neurobiological predispositions and the socio-psychological factors that interact with LH. Despite the encountered limitations and challenges, the researcher echoes the conviction that this research, "Is built on faith that compiling reliable findings in a series of limited studies will eventually lead to increased understanding of the important broader issue we face" (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Zechmeister, 2000, p.171).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Items of the Coping Competence Questionnaire (CCQ)

1. I become easily discouraged by failures.
2. When my performance does not satisfy, I start to question my abilities
3. I often feel unable to deal with problems.
4. Failures can shake my self-confidence for a long time.
5. When I am confronted with unusual demands, I feel helpless
6. When I do not immediately succeed in a project, I quickly lose hope for a good outcome.
7. When I can't solve a task, I blame my lack of abilities.
8. When I fail at something, I tend to give up.
9. When my work is criticized, I feel depressed.
10. I often feel overpowered by obstacles or troubles.
11. I lose faith in myself when I make mistakes.
12. If I do not instantly succeed in a matter, I am at a loss Scale statistics.

Appendix B

Attributional style Questionnaire

Hypothetical Events of the Attributional Style Questionnaire

Outcome	Goal area	Events[a]
Good	Achievement	(3) You become very rich. (10) You apply for a position that you want very badly (e.g., important job, graduate school admission) and you get it. (12) You get a raise.
Good	Affiliation	(1) You meet a friend who compliments you on your appearance. (6) You do a project that is highly praised. (9) Your spouse (boyfriend / girl friend) has been treating you more lovingly.
Bad	Achievement	(2) You have been looking for a job un-successfully for some time. (5) You give an important talk in front of a group and the audience reacts negatively. (8) You can't get all the work done that others expect of you.
Bad	Affiliation	(4) A friend comes to you with a problem

and you don’t try to help.

(7) You meet a friend who acts hostilely toward you.

(11) You go on a date and it goes badly.

Appendix C

Original

Questionnaire

Name:…… Grade:…… Date: ……

Dear Student,

This questionnaire asks about your **honest** feelings and opinion. The purpose of it is to help the researchers understand your point of view. Your name **will not** be used in the research, and the answers will *only* be seen by the researchers. Thank you for your cooperation.

1- I believe that getting a better mark in…….is:

a) not important.
b) somewhat important.
c) very important.

2- I feel that if I try harder in …….,

a) I will do better.
b) Nothing will change.
c) I will do worse.

3- When I receive a low or failing grade on a …….. test,

a) I plan to work harder next time.
b) I will not do anything about it.
c) I feel this is what I expected.

4- In the next / future ……..test:

a) I expect to get a better mark.
b) I expect to get the same mark.

c) I expect to get a lower mark.

5- When the teacher asks questions in…… class,

a) I often participate in answering the questions.
b) I sometimes participate in answering the questions
c) I don't participate in answering the questions.

6- When I find difficulty understanding something in …….class,

a) I always ask the teacher for help.
b) I sometimes ask the teacher for help.
c) I don't ask the teacher for help.

7- When I'm given a …… assignment /homework to complete at home,

a) I spend a lot of time on it.
b) I spend some time on it.
c) I spend little time on it.

8- When I'm given a …….. project:

a) I put a lot of effort and care into it.
b) I put some effort and care into it.
c) I put little effort and care into it.

9- I feel that I am not doing well in this subject because:

a) My teacher says I'm not good at it.
b) My parents say I'm not good at it.
c) I believe I'm not good at it.
d) Another reason……..

10- I have spoken about the difficulties I have in …….. with:

a) The social specialist.

b) The teacher.

c) Supervisor.

d) No one.

Appendix D

Final (modified)

Questionnaire

Name:……. Grade:…….…… Date: ……

Dear Student,

This questionnaire asks about your **honest** feelings and opinion. The purpose of it is to help the researchers understand your point of view. Your name **will not** be used in the research, and the answers will *only* be seen by the researchers. Thank you for your cooperation.

Please circle the answer that best describes your feelings and opinion.

1- I believe that getting a *better mark* in ……. is important.

   a- Strongly agree.
   b- Agree.
   c- Neutral (not sure).
   d- Disagree.
   e- Strongly disagree.

2- I believe that if I *try harder* ……., I will do better.

   a- Strongly agree.
   b- Agree.
   c- Neutral (not sure).
   d- Disagree.
   e- Strongly disagree.

3- When I receive a **low or failing** grade on a …….. test, I plan to *work harder* next time.

a- Strongly agree.
b- Agree.
c- Neutral (not sure).
d- Disagree.
e- Strongly disagree.

4- When I receive a low or failing grade on a …… test, I feel this is what I expected.

a- Strongly agree.
b- Agree.
c- Neutral (not sure).
d- Disagree.
e- Strongly disagree.

5- When the …… teacher asks questions in the class, I **often** participate in answering the questions.

a- Strongly agree.
b- Agree.
c- Neutral (not sure).
d- Disagree.
e- Strongly disagree.

6- When I find **difficulty** understanding something in class, I **often** ask the teacher for help.

a- Strongly agree.
b- Agree.
c- Neutral (not sure).
d- Disagree.
e- Strongly disagree.

7- When I am given homework or a project to complete at home, I spend *a lot* of time and effort on it.

a- Strongly agree.
b- Agree.
c- Neutral (not sure).
d- Disagree.
e- Strongly disagree.

8- I feel that *I am not doing well* in this subject because:

a- My teacher says I'm not good at it.
b- My parents say I'm not good at it.
c- I believe I'm not good at it
d- Another reason: ……

9- If I have difficulties in ……, I usually speak to:

a- The social advisor.
b- The teacher.
c- The supervisor.
d- No one.

Appendix E

Arabic version

اســـــتـبيان

اسم الطالب :..... الصف :..... التاريخ :.....

عزيزي الطالب ، هذا الاستبيان يستفسر عن شعورك و رأيك بصدق و صراحة و الهدف منه مساعدة الباحثين لفهم وجهة نظرك ، اسمك لن يرد في البحث ، و الإجاابات لا يراها سوى الباحثون .

اختر الإجابة التي تنطبق عليك شاكرين لكم حسن تعاونكم

1- أعتقد أن حصولي على **علامة جيدة** في مادة ..... يعد أمراً **مهماً** .	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
2- أعتقد أني إذا **بذلت جهداً أكبر** سأحصل على **نتيجة أفضل** في مادة	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
3- عندما أحصل على درجة ***منخفضة أو راسبة*** في امتحان مادة .....**أخطط للدراسة أكثر للامتحان القادم** .	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O

4- عندما أحصل على درجة **منخفضة أو راسبة** في امتحان مادة ..... أشعر أن هذا **ما توقعته** .	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
5- عندما يطرح مدرس مادة .....أسئلة في الصف ، **غالبا** ما أشارك في الإجابة .	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
6- إذا وجدت **صعوبة** في فهم أمر ما في الصف ، أطلب من مدرس مادة ..... **المساعدة**.	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
7- عندما أعطى واجباً أو مشروعاً للاتمام في المنزل، أبذل **الكثير** من الوقت و الجهد عليه.	
أ. أوافق بشدة	O
ب. أوافق	O
ج. غير متأكد	O
د. لا أوافق	O
هـ. لا أوافق بشدة	O
8- أعتقد أن أدائي **ليس جيداً** في مادة .....لأن :	
أ. مدرس المادة يقول أن أدائي ليس جيداً.	O

ب. والداي يقولان أن أدائي ليس جيداً.	O
ج. أنا اعتقد أن أدائي ليس جيداً.	O
د. لسبب آخر.	أعط السبب :.....
9- إذا وجدتُ صعوبات في مادة ..... أناقشُ الأمر مع	
أ. المرشد /ة الإجتماعي	O
ب. مدرس /ة المادة	O
ج. المشرف / ة	O
د. لا أحد	O

Appendix F

Excerpts from students interview transcripts

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 19/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **7B12**	Start: 10:37	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	End: 11:00	[ ] Questions from self-report Questionnaire
Transcriber: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School Library	

74. **I**: Okay, **Q8.** [I don't think I do well in Math because…] here, you chose 'my parents don't think I do well',
75. What do they tell you to make you feel that way?
76. **R**: They tell me to improve in Math… I try to improve in Math… but my grades are getting lower…
77. I feel there is something that is causing my grade to be low… My mom and Dad tell me to improve… and I'm trying to improve… I read… and memorize… but in the end… I don't know.
78. **I**: But, you feel that you are doing your best… Do you think there is another reason, other than Math being difficult?
79. **R**: That's it… I try to concentrate with the teacher… but I feel like I'm weak… and bothered.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **7G3**	Start: 11:23 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

38. **I**: Okay, question (**5**), you selected 'not sure'. Do you consider yourself a participator in the English class compared to your classmates?
39. **R**: Kind of.
40. **I**: When do you feel motivated to participate?
41. **R**: Well, depending on how much I have understood the lesson or the question.
42. **I**: Do you feel like you participate more than some of your classmates?
43. **R**: No, I'm one of the least.

44. **I**: For question (**6**), you selected ‘not sure’, how do you see yourself? Do you ask your English teacher to explain what you find difficult? Inside or outside the classroom?
45. **R**: Shakes her head.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **8B36**	Start: 11:01 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

6. **I**: Okay, you also chose ‘not sure’ for Q2. [ ], so why aren’t you sure that working harder may help you in achieving better grades?
7. **R**: I study but when the exam comes I don’t answer.
8. **I**: So why don’t you answer questions in the test, do you find them difficult?
9. **R**: I don’t know the meaning of the words… I read the question and don’t know what they mean.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **8G25**	Start: 11:42 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

10. **I**: Okay, for the **second** question, you chose ‘not sure’. So you feel that this has to do with your effort or something else?
11. **R**: I feel that when I study, it just doesn’t get into my brain.
12. **I**: So, you don’t understand it. Do you feel if you study more you will achieve the same grade?
13. **R**: Well, I study, but to no avail.
14. **I**: So, do you study Science in the same way you study other subjects?
15. **R**: Honestly, Science, okay I study it, but English I put more effort into it.
16. **I**: For the **third** question, you selected ‘I agree’. Can you tell me how you plan to study harder?
17. **R**: Well, I study for hours, staying away from my phone and that stuff. I write what’s written in the book and try to memorize it.
18. **I**: Okay, so do you study all subjects in the same way?
19. **R**: Yeah, normally.

20. **I**: So how do you normally study for Science?
21. **R**: I read it, then I try to recite it. But during the exam I forget what I memorized.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **9B69**	Start: 11:11 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

94. **I**: There is the supervisor, the social counselor, the teacher, which one? You can change your answer, do you discuss this problem with any one?
95. **R**: No.
96. **I**: Why?
97. **R**: Shrugs.
98. **I**: If you believe that it's important to get a good mark, why don't you try to speak to someone about your problem?
99. **R**: Sometimes when I try to talk, I feel like it's not worth it, it's better to talk at home to someone.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/2/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **9G50**	Start: 11:50 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

36. **I**: For question (**5**), you selected 'I disagree'. So, how do you view your participation? Do you consider yourself with the group that participates least or most?
37. **R**: With the group that participates least.
38. **I**: If the teacher encourages you, do you take the initiative and participate?
39. **R**: Kind of.
40. **I**: For the following question, you chose 'not sure'. If you find something difficult…
41. **R**: I ask my friends.
42. **I**: So, why don't you ask your teacher?
43. **R**: I'm more comfortable asking my friends.

Appendix G

Excerpts from teachers interview transcripts

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 05/01/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **English teacher**	Start: 07:23 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Home	
Transcriber: Researcher	Library Hall	

27. Since English is considered an accumulative school subject, and in front of more than 25 students with different levels in each class, a teacher finds it really challenging, and needs all the help to support low achievers.
28. **I**: So, you think it's not in the teacher's ability to improve the status of low achievers?
29. **R**: In such conditions, no. If one or two of the conditions changed, maybe the situation would be better. Like, for example teaching a less number of students, to not include students with special needs… to have more teaching techniques and equipment, to have more meetings with parents… but we don't have all of these.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 19/02/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Arabic teacher**	Start: 10:24 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Classroom, Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher		

5. **R**: Of course, underachievers' participation in class is always limited, to the extent that its rare,
6. especially if there is no prompting from the teacher. Concerning work outside of class, they have
7. very little initiative, they try to distance themselves from most tasks.
8. **I**: Do you feel that they are trying their best when they are given homework, compared to their
9. peers are they exerting the same effort?
10. **R**: If they find difficulty in the assigned tasks, they avoid doing the work. However, for the easy
11. projects they participate as a way to compensate for how little they participate and complete assignment.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 21/12/2015	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Math teacher**	Start: 09:50 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Classroom, Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher		

16. **I**: Okay, for the second question, according to your observation, how do low achieving students
17. behave when they receive substandard grades?
18. **R**: There are cases; they are not all the same. Some are concerned, but their abilities remain weak.
19. No matter how much they try, they show you that they are putting in effort at home, they are
20. Unable to attain satisfactory results. Some are unable to surpass failing grades. There are some
21. Students whose parents are more concerned, they try to provide them with support at home, despite this, they don't succeed, and others do,
22. but they reach the minimum passing level only, and that's fine. There are some students who are helpless,
23. they are not willing to respond, and neither are their parents. In some cases, they may have special
24. circumstances at home, like mothers who do not speak the Arabic language, or families with
25. restraining circumstances like constant travel, not being settled down influences a student's level at school.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 20/02/2015	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Science teacher**	Start: 11:22 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Classroom, Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher		

23. **I**: Is there any professional support for low achieving students?
24. **R**: No, not in our school. Not for all the subjects, only for English and Arabic. I think that the
25. Science teacher should find time to work on weaker skills and lessons with in the class schedule.
26. English and Arabic are accumulative subjects, meaning that courses can be given to address basic
27. Skills or missed information, that is not the case for science.

Appendix H

Excerpts from supervisor interview transcripts

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 10/02/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Social counselor**	Start: 11:01 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Office, Al-Noor Int. School	
Transcriber: Researcher		

47. **R**: Well, once I conducted a session about time management, and students explained how they plan
48. their day from waking till sleep time. I discovered that students study for about (**3**), maybe (**2**)
49. hours a day and the rest of the time is spent on Social media.
50. **I**: Do you feel that (**2**) hours of study is enough for them.
51. **R**: No, definitely not. There are some girls who say they depend on their school, sometimes they
52. don't benefit from school, and nothing is done at home. Some parents only allow their children to
53. spend time on the phone during the weekend, and some children have open access to mobile phones without any constraints,
54. this is the main obstacle that stands in the way of both the student and the teacher.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 19/02/2016	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Academic Coordinator**	Start: 11:07 am	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Classroom	
Transcriber: Researcher		

56. **R**: Okay, well, scientifically, I think it's the responsibility of all parties in the school, but the largest
57. part is on the teacher himself, because he is in the classroom all the time, he is teaching, and testing
58. and checking students' achievement and fluency all the time. So, the teacher first needs identify the case.
59. What should happen logically is there is a responsibility on the social specialist, and on the English coordinator to identify the reasons behind these cases, if it is related to ability, or motivation or to helplessness,
60. then they decide what kind of support is needed; if it is related to a family problem, or to a

61. knowledge problem, technically this is the correct way, but it's not always possible to go through that criteria in most of the schools, and particularly in our school, like sometimes, for some cases, teachers suggest some kind of program, and it is considered through communicating with the parents.

Interviewer: Researcher	Date: 21/12/2015	I=Interviewer
Interviewee: **Academic Supervisor**	Start: 01:44 pm	R=Respondent
Translator: Researcher	Site: Supervisor residence	
Transcriber: Researcher		

27. **R**: I think only those students who don't have the willingness, and are unable to try to develop themselves, only these students will not benefit from these programs.
28. **I**: Okay, can you tell me how can we identify this group of unwilling students?
29. **R**: We can identify them from their behavior and reactions in school, and from asking them to do
30. tasks and see how well they do them, and from their marks. Taking care to notice if they are careless towards their work.