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# Comprehensive Strategies for Enhancing Academic Achievement Among Underachieving School Students

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## Abstract

Underachievement among secondary school students remains a significant challenge. The mismatch between students' academic potential and actual performance is driven by interconnected internal factors, such as low motivation and ineffective learning strategies, and external influences including parenting style, peer interactions, and academic pressure. This study aims to identify the factors contributing to underachievement, evaluate school-based intervention strategies, and analyze their effectiveness in improving motivation, learning behavior, and academic performance. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of academic documents involving underachieving students, school counselors, subject teachers, and parents. The results indicate that interventions such as individual counseling, group guidance, learning development services, remedial programs, and collaboration between counselors and teachers provide positive improvements, yet their success depends heavily on intervention consistency, parental involvement, and students' readiness to change. Integrated and continuous support is shown to enhance motivation and academic performance, though challenges persist related to family communication and commitment. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive collaborative intervention models to more effectively address underachievement and support student academic success in secondary schools.

## Keywords

Academic Achievement, Guidance and Counseling, Intervention Strategies, Learning Motivation, Underachievement

## 1. Introduction

Education serves as a crucial foundation in the development of high-quality human resources. The success of an educational system is not only measured by student access and participation, but also by the quality of learning and academic achievement. Low academic achievement impacts not only individual students but also reflects the effectiveness of the educational process at the school level. Therefore, the challenge of improving student achievement has become a primary concern for educators, parents, and policymakers. One complex phenomenon in education is underachievement. Underachievement occurs when there is a discrepancy between a student's intellectual potential (such as a high IQ) and their actual academic performance. It is not merely a failure in learning, but a deeper issue involving motivation, self-concept, learning strategies, and the school environment (Ormrod, 2012).

According to Lubis and Dahlan (2023), underachievers are students who possess strong intellectual potential yet are unable to utilize it optimally in real academic achievement. The phenomenon of underachievement has also been studied in the context of secondary education. For example, students with high potential can still produce low academic achievement due to various factors, including inappropriate teaching methods (Mu'min, 2025; Fikri et al., 2025). Furthermore, in the context of senior high schools, a study by Susanti et al. (2024) found that high IQ does not always lead to high learning outcomes: several students categorized as underachieving were identified, and both internal and external factors were found to play a role.

The impact of underachievement can be long-term. Underachieving students may feel frustrated, lose motivation, or even develop a low academic self-concept. According to Lelono (2011), the role of guidance and counseling (*Bimbingan Konseling/BK*) teachers is crucial in addressing underachievement. The study found that many underachieving students face problems related to learning motivation, study skills, and socio-emotional environments, and that the role of BK teachers has not been maximized due to high student-counselor ratios and limited time. Beyond individual services, counseling interventions can also be conducted in groups. For example, Khasanah et al. (2013) demonstrated that group guidance services significantly improved the learning motivation of underachieving students. In addition, other counseling models, such as reality counseling, have been implemented to support underachievers by focusing on present behavior and building positive relationships between counselors and students.

More specifically, research in Indonesia has identified the characteristics of underachieving students, including gifted students who fail to channel their potential due to a lack of attention or limited understanding by teachers of their abilities. These findings emphasize that although students may possess high intellectual capacity, without appropriate intervention, their potential may diminish or remain underutilized.

Although previous literature has examined underachievement and counseling interventions across various school contexts, little research has examined the specific context of SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat. Each school has unique dynamics related to student profiles, school culture, parental support, and the availability of counseling services. Without contextual research, intervention strategies may be ineffective or misaligned with the specific needs of students in that environment. Based on this review, this study is essential to identify the factors causing underachievement among students at SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat, evaluate intervention strategies (such as BK services, counseling, or group guidance) that have been or could be implemented at the school, and measure the effectiveness of these interventions in improving motivation and academic performance among underachieving students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Students' Underachievement**

Underachievement is generally defined as a condition in which a student's actual academic performance consistently falls significantly below their intellectual potential or ability (for example, as indicated by IQ test results or prior achievement). This formulation distinguishes underachievers from "low-achieving" students who genuinely have limited cognitive capacity; the key difference lies in the expectation gap between potential and output. Therefore, operational definitions must be clearly established in each case study to ensure valid subject identification (Yusuf & Kasmi, 2022). Common indicators used in research include: a significant discrepancy between ability or intelligence scores and report card grades, declines in performance between semesters, academic disengagement or absenteeism (apathy), teacher or counselor reports regarding non-academic behavior, and observations of ineffective learning strategies. In school settings, operational criteria are often established such as a minimum score gap between potential (test results) and academic grades, or a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators (Guskey, 2007).

Underachievement is not merely a numerical or report-card issue; it affects self-concept, long-term motivation, and access to future educational opportunities. Without intervention, underachieving students may experience declines in psychosocial well-being and face risks such as dropping out or pursuing academic or career pathways that do not match their true potential. Therefore, a case study focused on practical intervention strategies in schools is highly necessary and plays a critical role in supporting students.

### **2.2 Factors Contributing to Underachievement**

This literature review categorizes the causes of underachievement into two main groups: internal factors, including low motivation, weak academic self-concept, self-regulation difficulties, and emotional challenges; and external factors, such as instructional quality, teacher expectations, family support, school climate, and policies (Pintrich, 2004). Underachievement typically arises from the interaction of multiple factors rather than a single cause (Suryadi & Purwanto, 2018).

Internal factors, particularly motivation and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), are frequently emphasized in studies of underachievement. SRL refers to the process by which students set learning goals, plan strategies, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and adjust approaches when necessary. It acts as a critical mediator between cognitive capacity and actual achievement: students with strong SRL skills can optimize their potential. Conversely, students with poor learning strategies, such as ineffective time management, limited comprehension monitoring, or weak problem-solving skills struggle to translate potential into academic success. Empirical evidence shows that systematic SRL interventions, including workshops, coaching, and task scaffolding, consistently improve students' learning management and often lead to higher academic performance across both online and face-to-face contexts (Broadbent, 2015).

External factors also play a key role. Teacher expectations, known as the Pygmalion effect, affect interactions, feedback, and the provision of challenging tasks, directly influencing student achievement. Realistic positive expectations enhance performance, while low expectations reinforce patterns of underachievement (Walkey et al., 2013). Parental involvement, whether constructive or dysfunctional, shapes motivation and study habits, and a supportive school climate further promotes engagement. In practice, observing whether teachers provide equitable learning opportunities, deliver constructive feedback, and avoid differential treatment of high-potential low-achieving students is critical. Teacher training focused on growth-oriented expectations and supportive communication can improve student outcomes (Laine & Tirri, 2023).

### 2.3 Strategies and Effectiveness of School Interventions

School-based guidance and counseling (*Bimbingan Konseling/BK*) services play a pivotal role in addressing underachievement by providing structured processes for student identification, targeted interventions, and referral coordination. In underachievement cases, BK serves as a bridge connecting the assessment of student needs, psychopedagogical interventions, and family involvement (Santrock, 2018). Evidence from practice indicates that combining individual counseling, which addresses emotional and motivational barriers, with structured group programs, such as training in learning strategies, motivation enhancement, and peer support, yields more consistent and sustainable improvements than isolated interventions. Action research in Indonesian schools further confirms that structured group counseling can significantly enhance student motivation and foster positive academic behaviors (Khasanah, 2013).

Parental involvement is another key factor influencing the success of interventions. Meta-analyses show that active engagement, through academic support at home, positive communication with schools, and fostering supportive academic expectations, positively affects student achievement (Costa et al., 2024). Case studies should therefore examine the quality and patterns of parental support, distinguishing between structured, effective involvement and less productive practices. Interventions to empower parents, such as workshops or guidance on home learning support, can complement school-based efforts. The broader school climate, including safety, interpersonal relationships, academic culture, and leadership, also shapes the effectiveness of interventions. A positive climate promotes student engagement and motivation, while an unsupportive environment can hinder long-term impact (Yin, 2014; Yusuf & Kasmi, 2022).

Theoretical frameworks on learning motivation theory further guide intervention design. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan emphasizes the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness; the fulfillment of these needs enhances intrinsic motivation, whereas their thwarting can lead to avoidance and underachievement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Achievement Goal Theory complements this by highlighting mastery orientation as a driver of sustained engagement. In practice, interventions target competence through mastery-oriented feedback, autonomy via choice in assignments, and relatedness through teacher and peer support. Effectiveness is assessed through narrative changes, observational data, and short-term academic indicators (Khasanah et al., 2013).

### 3. Methods

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach and a case study method. The data collection technique employed in this study was triangulation. A qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration of students' internal experiences, perceptions, and behavioral responses, as well as the roles of external factors such as family support, school environment, and instructional interventions. The case study design is particularly suitable for capturing the holistic, real-life context of SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat, enabling the researcher to examine not only observable behaviors and academic outcomes but also the processes and interactions that contribute to underachievement.

The selection of data sources from SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat in Bekasi Regency was based on purposive sampling, meaning that participants were selected in accordance with the research objectives and predetermined criteria. The sampling technique used was purposive. However, in practice, the sample may be expanded using snowball sampling. The data collection was carried out through observation,

interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2019). Interviews were conducted with students, teachers, school counselors, and parents using semi-structured guidelines to explore perceptions, experiences, and factors contributing to underachievement. Observations focused on classroom learning dynamics, student behavior, and teacher-student interactions to capture real-time learning processes and support strategies. Documentation involved the collection and review of academic records, counseling reports, and school-related documents to verify and triangulate information obtained from interviews and observations

The stages that facilitated the researcher in obtaining the data included: (1) planning the development of interview guidelines, documentation, and observation; (2) conducting field visits; and (3) carrying out observations (Yin, 2025). The researcher then selected informants as research subjects, including school stakeholders such as school supervisors, the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, and parents. Furthermore, the steps in data analysis followed the Miles et al. (2015) model, which states that data analysis occurs continuously or flows (flow model analysis). According to this approach, four activities are conducted: data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification/drawing conclusions (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Multifactorial Causes of Underachievement**

The research findings indicate that the phenomenon of underachievement at SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat is a multidimensional condition influenced by a combination of internal student factors, gaps in learning strategies, perceptions of school services, and the dynamics of support within the home environment. The following explanation summarizes the thematic results from in-depth interviews and discusses them in the context of relevant theories and prior research.

Interviews with students revealed that most underachieving students experience difficulties in subjects that require numerical skills, such as advanced mathematics and physics. One student explained that they struggled with the lessons because the material was highly complex and required extensive calculations. One student explained that they found learning particularly challenging because the material was highly complex and required extensive calculations. The student reported that abstract concepts, especially those involving the systematic manipulation of formulas, were difficult to understand and often led to cognitive overload, ultimately hindering their ability to keep up with the lessons. Difficulty in understanding the material directly affects motivation: the more students feel incapable, the lower their academic self-confidence becomes, leading to avoidance of learning tasks.

In addition, several students acknowledged barriers such as “laziness,” “forgetting the material,” or “difficulty recalling lessons.” These indications reflect weak Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) skills, particularly in aspects of planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. In fact, the literature indicates that students with low SRL abilities are more susceptible to underachievement because they are unable to manage time, review material independently, or use active learning strategies such as self-testing and elaboration.

Interviews with parents indicated that most families have made significant efforts to provide support. One parent explained that they were actively involved in overseeing their child’s academic progress and monitoring the completion of assigned tasks. The parent indicated that they consistently attempted to create a supportive and conducive learning environment at home, ensuring that the child had the necessary structure, supervision, and encouragement to focus on schoolwork effectively. This suggests that, in general, the family factor is not the primary barrier, although the level of involvement still varies across households.

In terms of internal factors, students demonstrated significant difficulties in subjects requiring advanced numerical and abstract processing skills, such as Advanced Mathematics and Physics, compounded by low self-management abilities in learning. Several students expressed barriers such as forgetting material, difficulty concentrating, or low interest in certain subjects, indicating weak self-regulated learning skills in planning, monitoring, and evaluation. In addition, differences in learning motivation, where some students show strong intrinsic motivation while others admit to giving up easily reflect diverse psychological conditions within the underachiever group, requiring a more individualized and adaptive intervention approach.

Regarding external factors, the study found that family support is generally high. Most parents provide routine supervision, adequate learning facilities, and monitor schoolwork and academic progress. However, not all parents have the ability or time to provide specific academic assistance, especially for difficult subjects. This indicates that the school still plays a central role in providing academic interventions and strengthening learning strategies, with families functioning as supportive partners that must be continuously empowered.

#### **4.2 Strategies for Addressing Underachievement**

Counseling and academic support services play a crucial role in addressing underachievement, particularly when students experience barriers related to motivation, learning skills, or emotional challenges. At SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat, the guidance and counseling unit is a key component in facilitating student development and improving academic outcomes. The school counselor implements a comprehensive, structured framework of services intended to meet students' needs holistically, not only through personal guidance but also through academic assistance. This section presents findings on the implementation of counseling services and instructional support within the school environment, as well as the challenges encountered in maximizing their effectiveness. The school counselor revealed that counseling services have been provided in accordance with the full professional counseling pathway, beginning with identification, assessment, diagnosis, intervention, evaluation, and follow-up. The counselor explained that the approaches used included individual counseling, group counseling, academic guidance, and training in learning skills such as time management (Kurniawan & Supriyanto, 2019).

However, the counselor also highlighted challenges related to negative perceptions among some students toward the counseling services. The counselor explained that some students tended to perceive the counseling office as a disciplinary authority similar to a "school police," rather than as a supportive service. According to the counselor, this perception caused certain students to become more withdrawn and less willing to participate openly in the counseling process, which ultimately reduced the effectiveness of the interventions and made it more difficult to build a trusting and collaborative relationship. This phenomenon can be explained by the therapeutic alliance theory, in which the effectiveness of counseling depends greatly on trust, comfort, and the client's acceptance of the counselor. When the initial relationship is negative, the intervention's impact is limited.

These findings are highly relevant to professional counseling practice: schools need to shift the image of counseling services from a discipline-oriented space to a center for academic support and learning well-being. This indicates the presence of additional instructional support, but it is not yet consistent or systematic for all underachieving students. From the learning perspective, students reported that subject teachers often provide "re-explanations," "answers when students do not understand," or "detailed instruction" on certain difficult topics. This reflects the presence of additional instructional support, although it has not yet been consistent and systematic for all underachieving students.

#### **4.3 Effectiveness of the Interventions**

The school counselor noted that early indicators of success are typically not immediately visible in academic grades, but rather in changes in learning behavior such as increased discipline, participation, and time-management skills. The counselor explained that behavioral improvements tend to appear more quickly than changes in academic grades. They noted that this pattern is especially evident when students have only recently begun receiving intensive support, as progress in areas such as discipline, participation, and time management usually emerges earlier than measurable increases in academic achievement.

This is supported by students' reports that they have become "more serious," "more able to manage time," and "more motivated when receiving support" from teachers or the counseling service. Parents also reinforced this finding by noting improvements in their children's discipline at home, including consistent adherence to study schedules and completion of school assignments.

These findings align with Prochaska's Behavior Change Model, which explains that internal changes (intentions, motivation, and study habits) precede measurable academic outcomes. Therefore, it can be concluded that school interventions have been effective at the initial stage in establishing a foundation for improved learning behavior, although direct academic impact requires more time to emerge.

This research also identified several barriers to effective handling of underachieving students. The school counselor reported that limited time, a large number of students to be served, and limited supporting facilities are major challenges. In addition, student resistance to counseling services and a lack of systematic coordination among teachers further slow the intervention process. According to the school counseling literature, the effectiveness of counseling services is strongly influenced by an ideal counselor-student ratio, the availability of consistent service space, and school policies that support integration between counseling staff and subject teachers. These barriers indicate that school-level interventions require organizational support to operate optimally.

#### **5. Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that underachievement at SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat is a complex phenomenon shaped by the interaction of internal student characteristics, school-based instructional practices, and family support dynamics. The internal dimension, particularly low motivation, weak academic self-confidence, and ineffective learning management, emerged as core contributors to academic decline. These outcomes strongly reinforce Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) theory, which posits that academic performance difficulties are often rooted not in cognitive limitations but in inadequate self-management strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Students in this study demonstrated limited ability to organize learning, recall lessons, or discipline themselves toward consistent study habits, indicating that interventions must focus on developing metacognitive skills rather than merely intensifying the delivery of instructional content (Li & Yuan, 2022).

The findings underscore the critical role of instructional differentiation in addressing learning disparities (Jaget et al., 2022). While subject teachers reported providing individualized support, such as repeating explanations or offering guidance on challenging tasks, these interventions were largely reactive and lacked systematic planning. This aligns with instructional frameworks that emphasize that ad hoc support alone is insufficient to close structural learning gaps (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023). Supporting this, Andayani and Iasha (2023) highlight that differentiated learning is a highly relevant approach for underachieving students, requiring tiered scaffolding, scheduled remedial programs, and mastery-oriented learning pathways to reinforce foundational understanding. Without such

systematic structures, teacher interventions risk benefiting only a limited number of students while failing to address the broader patterns of underachievement observed across the classroom (Ludicke et al., 2019).

Furthermore, guidance and counseling services play a crucial role, but their effectiveness is limited by negative perceptions among students (Supendi, 2020). Resistance toward counseling, shaped by the belief that the counseling office functions as a disciplinary authority, weakens therapeutic alliance, a relationship known to be central in driving behavioral and motivational change (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2012). Nevertheless, early indicators of intervention success were visible through improvements in behavioral dimensions such as discipline, time management, and active class engagement. These behavioral improvements align with Prochaska's Behavior Change Model, which posits that internal behavioral adjustments precede measurable increases in academic performance (Prochaska, 2008). Thus, while academic outcomes may not yet show substantial improvement, the observed behavioral progress represents an early and essential stage in long-term academic recovery.

This relatively strong family support plays an important role according to Epstein's (2018) framework on school-family partnerships, in which parental involvement positively influences students' motivation, self-control, and persistence. However, the results also revealed that some parents face limitations in providing academic assistance, such as not understanding certain subject matter or being unable to provide professional learning support. At this point, the school's role is essential in bridging this resource gap. The study also identified operational challenges, including an imbalance in counselor-student ratios, limited facilities, and uneven collaboration among teachers. These findings support the counseling literature, which emphasizes that effective intervention systems require institutional support, coordinated teamwork, and the structural allocation of resources (Sovy et al., 2025). Without organizational alignment, intervention inconsistency persists, reducing impact.

The findings reinforce the theory that underachievement is not merely an academic issue, but the result of interaction among motivation, SRL, social relationships, and environmental support. From a practical perspective, these results highlight the need for integrated rather than partial interventions. First, SRL training should become a core component of the program because most students demonstrate weaknesses in planning, monitoring, and self-reflection. Second, school counselors need to develop strength-based counseling approaches to reduce stigma. Third, subject teachers must consistently implement differentiated instructional strategies to support students who are lagging behind. Fourth, parents should remain involved through structured, ongoing communication. This multi-stakeholder integration has proven to be the most effective strategy for improving behavior, learning habits, and ultimately the academic performance of underachieving students.

## 6. Conclusion

This study found that underachievement at SMAN 1 Cikarang Pusat is a multidimensional phenomenon resulting from the interaction of internal factors, such as low motivation, weak self-regulated learning skills, and difficulties in managing complex, abstract subjects, and external factors, including variations in family support, perceptions of school services, and classroom instructional practices. Students reported challenges in subjects like advanced mathematics and physics, compounded by limited planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation skills, while parents generally provided supportive learning environments, albeit with some limitations in delivering subject-specific assistance. Guidance and counseling services, alongside teacher-provided instructional support, were identified as critical

to addressing these barriers; however, negative student perceptions of counseling as a disciplinary authority and inconsistent differentiated instruction limited overall effectiveness.

The findings imply that interventions for underachieving students must be holistic and coordinated, targeting both behavioral and academic outcomes. Behavioral improvements, such as enhanced discipline, engagement, and time management, were observed earlier than measurable academic gains, indicating that establishing self-regulation and motivation is a prerequisite for academic progress. Effective programs should integrate structured SRL training, strength-based counseling, mastery-oriented instructional strategies, active parental involvement through coaching, and multi-actor coordination via an Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

For practice, schools are encouraged to implement these integrated strategies systematically, monitor student progress regularly, and provide supporting facilities such as study rooms and peer tutoring. Limitations of this study include its focus on a single school, reliance on qualitative data, and potential variability in parental engagement. Future research should incorporate quantitative measures, such as longitudinal academic performance, psychometric assessments of motivation, and evaluations of specific interventions, such as SRL training, to complement qualitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of underachievement dynamics. By addressing these factors, schools can foster a more adaptive, supportive, and sustainable learning culture that effectively closes achievement gaps.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### ***Ethical Approval and Originality Statement***

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

### ***Data Disclosure Statement***

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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