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Impact of Chess Training on Abstract Reasoning, Metacognitive Abilities and Mathematical Performance among School Students: A Psychometric Investigation

Anupam Jit Kaur[1] & Sheojee Singh[2]

[1]Sohan Lal DAV College of Education, Ambala City, India (Bharat).
[1]Email: *virkanu24@gmail.com*(corresponding author)

[2]Government College of Education, Sector-20, Chandigarh-160020, India (Bharat).
[2]Email: *sheojee@gmail.com*

Abstract

In contemporary educational research, increasing attention has been directed towards learning experiences that cultivate advanced cognitive skills rather than surface-level content mastery. Chess, as a rule-governed strategic activity, requires players to engage in complex reasoning, anticipatory thinking and continuous self-monitoring, thereby offering potential cognitive benefits beyond recreation. This study explores the effects of structured chess training on abstract reasoning ability, meta-cognitive functioning and mathematical performance among secondary school students. A quantitative comparative design was employed using standardized psychometric assessments and a curriculum-based mathematics achievement test. Students who had received formal chess instruction were compared with peers who had no exposure to structured chess training. Statistical analyses included descriptive measures, independent samples t-tests, correlation coefficients and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that chess-trained students achieved significantly higher scores in abstract reasoning, metacognitive awareness and mathematics achievement. Moreover, both abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities were found to make significant independent contributions to mathematical performance. The study provides empirical evidence supporting chess as a cognitively enriching educational practice and offers implications for instructional planning, curriculum enrichment and policy initiatives aimed at strengthening students' cognitive and academic development.

Keywords: Chess instruction, abstract reasoning, metacognitive functioning, mathematics achievement, psychometric analysis, secondary education

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INTRODUCTION

Educational systems worldwide are progressively shifting their focus from rote acquisition of knowledge toward the development of cognitive competencies that enable learners to reason, reflect and regulate their own learning processes. Skills such as analytical thinking, self-regulation and strategic problem-solving are now widely recognized as foundational for academic success and long-term learning adaptability. Mathematics education, in particular, requires learners to operate at high levels of abstraction while continuously monitoring their cognitive strategies.

Within this evolving educational landscape, chess has gained recognition as a cognitively intensive activity with potential academic relevance. Unlike casual games, chess operates within a highly structured system that demands sustained concentration, logical evaluation of alternatives and forward planning. These demands closely parallel the cognitive processes involved in abstract reasoning and metacognitive regulation.

Abstract reasoning allows learners to identify underlying patterns, manipulate symbolic relationships and apply logical principles to unfamiliar situations. Metacognitive abilities enable individuals to consciously plan their approach to tasks, monitor progress and evaluate outcomes. Mathematical achievement is influenced by the effective interaction of both these cognitive processes.

Although prior studies have explored the educational value of chess, limited research has simultaneously examined its influence on abstract reasoning, metacognitive functioning and mathematical performance using a psychometric framework. The present investigation seeks to address this limitation by examining these variables in an integrated manner among secondary school students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study is theoretically grounded in cognitive and educational psychology, viewing chess training as a structured cognitive stimulus capable of influencing higher-order mental processes. Within this framework, chess training functions as the independent variable, while abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities operate as mediating cognitive constructs that collectively influence mathematical performance.

Psychometric Conceptual Model

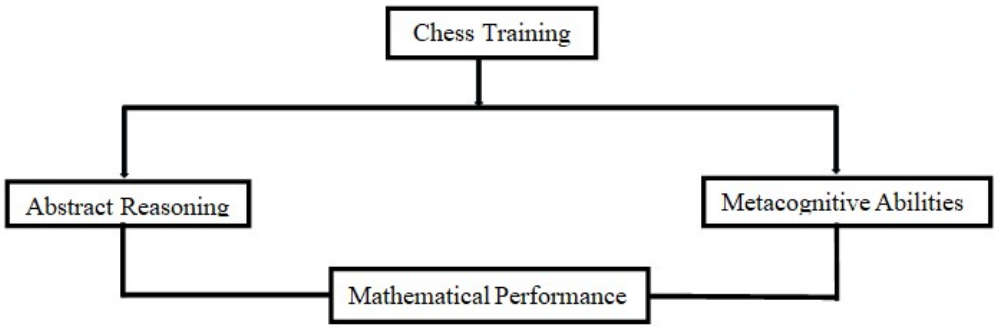


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the influence of chess training on mathematical performance through abstract reasoning and meta cognitive abilities.

The framework is based on the following propositions:

- Engagement in chess strengthens abstract reasoning by exposing learners to symbolic and relational problem structures.
- Chess training enhances metacognitive regulation through repeated cycles of planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- Abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities independently and jointly contribute to students' mathematical achievement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chess Training and Cognitive Processes

Chess involves a continuous process of analysis, decision-making and outcome evaluation, requiring players to manage complex information under time and rule constraints. These demands engage executive cognitive functions such as attentional control, working memory and cognitive flexibility. Educational research has shown that consistent involvement in chess activities can contribute to improved reasoning efficiency and problem-solving capacity among learners.

Studies examining transfer effects suggest that the cognitive strategies practiced during chess, such as anticipating consequences, comparing alternatives and correcting errors may extend beyond gameplay. Mathematics shares similar cognitive demands, particularly in tasks requiring logical structuring and strategic planning, making it a domain where such transfer effects are plausible.

Role of Abstract Reasoning in Mathematics Learning

Abstract reasoning refers to the capacity to process relationships and patterns without reliance on concrete representations. This ability underpins learners' capacity to generalize rules, interpret symbols and solve novel problems-core requirements of mathematical thinking. Learners with stronger abstract reasoning skills typically demonstrate greater flexibility and conceptual depth in mathematical problem-solving.

Psychometric investigations consistently report positive associations between abstract reasoning ability and mathematical achievement. Activities such as chess, which require manipulation of symbolic configurations and relational patterns, may reinforce reasoning skills applicable to mathematical learning contexts. Metacognitive Functioning and Academic Performance

Metacognitive functioning involves conscious awareness and regulation of cognitive activity. This includes the ability to plan approaches to tasks, monitor progress during execution and evaluate outcomes upon completion. Such regulation allows learners to adapt strategies, identify misconceptions and improve learning efficiency.

In mathematics education, metacognitive competence plays a central role due to the problem-oriented nature of the subject. Learners who actively regulate their thinking are more likely to approach complex tasks strategically and persist when faced with difficulty. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate meaningful relationships between metacognitive awareness and mathematics achievement.

Chess as a Medium for Metacognitive Engagement

The structure of chess inherently promotes metacognitive activity. Players must anticipate future states, assess current positions and revise strategies based on feedback from each move. This ongoing cycle of reflection and regulation closely aligns with metacognitive processes involved in academic learning.

Educational research indicates that students exposed to chess instruction often exhibit enhanced self-monitoring, improved strategic awareness and greater reflective capacity. These skills may generalize to academic contexts, particularly mathematics where similar cognitive regulation is required.

Integrated Cognitive Perspective

While existing research has explored the cognitive and academic benefits of chess training, fewer studies have examined how abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities jointly mediate its impact on mathematics achievement. A psychometric approach is essential to clarify these relationships and to establish chess as a systematic educational intervention rather than an incidental activity.

The present study adopts such an approach by examining the combined influence of chess training, abstract reasoning and metacognitive functioning on mathematical performance using standardized assessments and rigorous statistical methods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the levels of abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance among students undergoing chess training.
- To compare chess-trained and non-chess-trained students on these variables.
- To examine the relationships among abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance.
- To determine the predictive power of abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities on mathematical performance.

HYPOTHESES

i. Chess-trained students differ significantly from non-chess-trained students in abstract reasoning.

ii. Chess-trained students differ significantly from non-chess-trained students in metacognitive abilities.

iii. Chess-trained students differ significantly from non-chess-trained students in mathematical performance.

iv. Abstract reasoning is significantly correlated with mathematical performance.

v. Metacognitive abilities are significantly correlated with mathematical performance.

vi. Abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities significantly predict mathematical performance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive comparative and correlational design was used to examine group differences and interrelationships among abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance.

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 secondary school students selected through purposive sampling and divided equally into chess-trained and non-chess-trained groups. Groups were comparable in age, grade level

and curriculum exposure. The sample size satisfied statistical power requirements for correlational and regression analyses.

Tools Used

The following standardized tools were employed for data collection:

i. Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM)
   – Used to assess abstract reasoning ability
   – A non-verbal measure of fluid intelligence focusing on pattern recognition and logical reasoning
   –Widely validated for use with school-aged populations
   – Reported reliability coefficients typically exceed 0.80

ii. Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) (Schraw & Dennison)
   – Used to measure metacognitive abilities, including planning, monitoring and evaluation
   – Consists of items assessing both knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition
   – Demonstrates strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.75$)

iii. Mathematical Achievement Test (Researcher-Developed)
   – Based on the prescribed secondary school mathematics curriculum
   – Assessed conceptual understanding, procedural knowledge and problem-solving skills
   – Content validity established through expert review by mathematics educators
   – Reliability established using split-half method (r > 0.70)

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Abstract Reasoning, Metacognitive Abilities and Mathematical Performance.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Abstract Reasoning	Chess- trained	60	56.18	6.42
	Non Chess- trained	60	50.03	6.85
Metacognitive Abilities	Chess- trained	60	131.92	11.76
	Non Chess- trained	60	121.67	12.34
Mathematical Performance	Chess- trained	60	72.46	8.47
	Non Chess- trained	60	64.88	9.11

Note: Higher scores indicate higher levels of abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance.

Group Comparison (t-Test)

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Chess-Trained and Non-Chess-Trained Students.

Variable	Mean Difference	t- value	df	Sig. (2-tailed): < **0.001****
Abstract Reasoning	6.15	5.07	118	< .001
Metacognitive Abilities	10.25	4.58	118	< .001
Mathematical Performance	7.58	4.68	118	< .001

Note: p < .01 indicates statistically significant group differences.

Correlation Analysis

It is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Matrix among Study Variables.

Variable	Abstract Reasoning	Metacognitive Abilities	Mathematical Performance
Abstract Reasoning	1.00		
Metacognitive Abilities	.56**	1.00	
Mathematical Performance	.61**	.59**	1.00

Note: p < .01 (two-tailed). Correlations indicate moderate to strong positive relationships.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Dependent Variable: Mathematical Performance

N = 120

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Mathematical Performance.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	Significance
Constant	22.14	3.48	-	6.36	< .001
Abstract Reasoning	0.44	0.08	.39	5.52	<.001
Metacognitive Abilities	0.29	0.07	.34	4.87	< .001

Table 5: Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of Estimate
0.70	0.49	0.48	6.21

Note: Abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities together explain 49% of the variance in mathematical performance.

Table 6: ANOVA Summary for Regression Model.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Regression	3,982.36	2	1,991.18	51.59	< 0.001
Residual	4,530.44	117	38.73		
Total	8,512.80	119			

Note: The regression model is statistically significant at p <0.01.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed statistically significant differences between chess-trained and non-chess-trained students across all three variables. Students who had undergone chess training demonstrated higher levels of abstract reasoning, stronger metacognitive abilities, and superior mathematical performance. Correlation analysis indicated moderate to strong positive relationships among abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance. Multiple regression analysis further established that abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities jointly serve as significant predictors of mathematical performance, accounting for nearly half of the observed variance.

Educational Implications

Implications for Teaching and Learning

The findings indicate that chess training enhances abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities, both of which are essential for effective mathematics learning. Classroom instruction may therefore benefit from incorporating chess-inspired strategies that promote logical reasoning, evaluation of alternatives and strategic thinking. Mathematics teachers can encourage students to analyze multiple solution pathways and reflect on their reasoning processes, thereby fostering conceptual understanding rather than procedural learning.

Implications for Metacognitive Skill Development

The improved metacognitive abilities observed among chess-trained students highlight the potential of chess as a tool for developing self-regulated learning. Chess naturally engages learners in planning, monitoring and evaluation, which are key components of metacognition. Integrating reflective practices modelled on chess-based decision-making can help students become more aware of their thinking processes and improve problem-solving performance in mathematics.

Implications for Curriculum and Enrichment Programs

Given the strong relationship between abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities and mathematical performance, curriculum planners may consider including chess as a structured enrichment activity within school programs. Chess-based modules or co-curricular initiatives can serve as effective supplements to mathematics instruction, particularly at the secondary level where abstract thinking and strategic reasoning are critical.

Implications in the Context of NEP 2020

The findings align with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes competency-based, experiential and learner-centred education. Chess training supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills advocated by the policy, including critical thinking and problem-solving. Incorporating chess-based learning within Indian school education can thus contribute to the holistic and multidisciplinary vision of NEP 2020.

Implications for Educational Planning and Teacher Development

At the institutional level, chess should be viewed as an educational enrichment tool rather than merely a recreational activity. Schools may support structured chess programs through clubs or activity periods. Additionally, teacher education and professional development initiatives can familiarize educators with chess-based pedagogical approaches that enhance reasoning and metacognitive skills in the classroom.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the present study offers meaningful insights into the relationship between chess training, abstract reasoning, metacognitive abilities, and mathematical performance, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size, though adequate for the statistical analyses employed, and the restricted geographical scope may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may benefit from larger and more diverse samples drawn from varied educational settings.

Further research is also needed to examine the long-term impact of chess training through longitudinal and experimental designs. Investigating classroom-based chess interventions across different age groups and educational contexts may strengthen the empirical evidence for chess-integrated instructional practices. Additionally, future studies could explore the influence of variables such as gender, socioeconomic background and prior achievement levels to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the educational effects of chess training.

CONCLUSION

The present psychometric investigation demonstrates that chess training is positively associated with the development of abstract reasoning and metacognitive abilities, which in turn contribute to improved mathematical performance among school students. The findings suggest that structured engagement with chess may serve as an effective educational enrichment activity by fostering higher-order cognitive skills relevant to mathematics learning. Integrating chess-based learning experiences within school education may therefore support students' cognitive development and academic achievement.

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