

A Conceptual Review of Adversity Quotient among Adolescents: Theories, Dimensions, and Educational Implications

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. Alongside these developmental transitions, adolescents encounter numerous academic, personal, and social challenges that require effective coping mechanisms. The concept of Adversity Quotient (AQ), introduced by Stoltz (1997), has gained increasing attention as a psychological construct that explains individuals' capacity to respond effectively to adversity, setbacks, and challenges. Unlike Intelligence Quotient (IQ), which reflects cognitive ability, or Emotional Quotient (EQ), which focuses on emotional regulation, AQ emphasizes resilience, perseverance, and adaptive responses during difficult situations. This conceptual review synthesizes the theoretical foundations, dimensions, and educational significance of AQ among adolescents by critically examining existing literature. The paper discusses the evolution of AQ theory, the CORE dimensions (Control, Ownership, Reach, and Endurance), and the relationship of AQ with resilience, grit, emotional intelligence, motivation, and academic achievement. The paper explores Educational implications for secondary schools are highlighted, emphasizing the role of teachers, school leadership, counseling services, and social-emotional learning in fostering students' ability to overcome adversity. This review based paper contributes to the growing body of literature advocating the integration of psychological competencies into school education to prepare adolescents for academic success and lifelong resilience.

Keywords: Adversity Quotient, Adolescents, Secondary School Students

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a significant stage of human development characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. Generally spanning the ages of 10 to 19 years, this period involves identity formation, increasing independence, emotional maturity, and the development of interpersonal relationships. Alongside these developmental changes, adolescents face numerous academic, social, emotional, and personal challenges that influence their overall growth and future success. Academic competition, examination stress, peer pressure, family expectations, technological distractions, social media influences, and uncertainty regarding career choices often create considerable psychological pressure among secondary school students. These developmental transitions often expose adolescents to various forms of adversity, including academic stress, examination pressure, family conflicts, peer competition, social media influences, bullying, mental health concerns, and uncertainty regarding future

careers. The ability to manage these adversities effectively has become an essential determinant of students' educational success and psychological well-being (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013).

In today's rapidly changing educational landscape, academic excellence alone is no longer considered sufficient for success. Students are expected to demonstrate adaptability, perseverance, problem-solving ability, emotional regulation, and resilience while facing various life challenges. Consequently, educational researchers have shifted their attention from cognitive intelligence alone to psychological competencies that enable individuals to cope effectively with adversity.

Traditionally, Intelligence Quotient (IQ) has been regarded as the primary predictor of academic performance and success. Later, Emotional Quotient (EQ) emerged as an equally important construct explaining individuals' ability to understand and regulate emotions (Goleman, 1995). However, both IQ and EQ fail to adequately explain why some individuals continue striving despite repeated failures while others give up even though they possess high intellectual or emotional abilities. This limitation led Paul G. Stoltz (1997) to introduce the concept of Adversity Quotient (AQ).

Adversity Quotient refers to an individual's capacity to withstand difficulties, recover from setbacks, and transform challenges into opportunities for growth. According to Stoltz (1997), adversity is inevitable in every individual's life, but people's responses to adversity differ significantly. Those with high AQ perceive challenges as temporary and manageable, whereas those with low AQ often view difficulties as permanent and uncontrollable. AQ therefore serves as a valuable predictor of persistence, resilience, motivation, and long-term achievement.

The significance of AQ has increased considerably in recent years because adolescents encounter diverse challenges both inside and outside the classroom. Academic stress, competitive examinations, family expectations, cyberbullying, mental health concerns, and the after-effects of disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of psychological resilience among students. Developing AQ can help adolescents maintain emotional balance, overcome failures, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue pursuing their educational goals.

Educational institutions play a crucial role in fostering students' AQ by creating supportive learning environments, encouraging problem-solving, promoting positive relationships, and providing opportunities to develop coping skills. Teachers, school leaders, parents, and counselors all contribute to strengthening adolescents' ability to deal effectively with adversity.

Although AQ has attracted growing scholarly attention, existing literature remains fragmented across psychology, education, and management disciplines. Much of the available research focuses on empirical relationships between AQ and academic achievement, while comparatively fewer studies provide a comprehensive conceptual understanding of AQ among adolescents. Therefore, this paper reviews the theoretical foundations, dimensions, influencing factors, and educational implications of AQ, with particular emphasis on secondary school students.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present conceptual review aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the theoretical foundations and evolution of AQ;
2. To explain the CORE dimensions of AQ;
3. To explore the educational implications of integrating AQ into secondary school education.

3. Concept of Adversity Quotient

The concept of Adversity Quotient (AQ) was introduced by Paul G. Stoltz (1997) in his influential book *Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities*. Stoltz argued that while intelligence and emotional competence are important, they do not fully explain why some individuals succeed despite repeated failures and difficult life circumstances. AQ was therefore developed to measure an individual's ability to respond positively to adversity.

Stoltz (1997) defined AQ as the capacity to deal with adversities, overcome obstacles, recover from setbacks, and continue striving toward personal and professional goals. Individuals possessing higher AQ demonstrate greater perseverance, optimism, flexibility, and determination when confronted with difficult situations. Conversely, individuals with lower AQ are more likely to become discouraged, avoid challenges, and abandon their goals.

AQ extends beyond mere resilience. While resilience primarily refers to recovering after adversity, AQ emphasizes the entire process of perceiving, interpreting, managing, and overcoming difficult situations. It reflects an individual's mindset and behavioral responses before, during, and after adversity.

Stoltz (1997) categorized individuals into three metaphorical groups:

- **Quitters:** Individuals who avoid challenges and give up easily.
- **Campers:** Individuals who achieve moderate success but become comfortable and stop striving for further improvement.
- **Climbers:** Individuals who continuously overcome obstacles, embrace challenges, and persist until they achieve their goals.

Among adolescents, these categories can be observed in academic settings. Students with high AQ continue working despite poor examination results, whereas those with low AQ may lose confidence after experiencing temporary failure.

AQ also complements other psychological constructs such as Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), Resilience, Growth Mindset, and Grit. IQ determines cognitive ability, EQ focuses on emotional regulation, while AQ specifically explains an individual's response to adversity and challenges.

4. Theoretical Foundations of Adversity Quotient

Although AQ was conceptualized by Stoltz (1997), several established psychological theories provide a strong theoretical basis for understanding its development and educational significance.

4.1 Adversity Quotient Theory (Stoltz, 1997)

Adversity Quotient (AQ) Theory, developed by Paul G. Stoltz (1997), is the primary theoretical foundation for understanding how individuals respond to difficulties and challenges. Stoltz argued that success in life is determined not only by intelligence (IQ) or emotional intelligence (EQ), but also by the ability to face and overcome adversity. According to the theory, people experience obstacles in every aspect of life, including education, career, relationships, and personal growth. The way they interpret and respond to these obstacles determines their level of achievement and well-being (Stoltz, 1997).

Stoltz proposed that individuals with a high Adversity Quotient view challenges as temporary, manageable, and opportunities for learning. They remain optimistic, maintain emotional control, and continue working toward their goals despite setbacks. Conversely, individuals with a low AQ are more likely to become discouraged, blame external factors, give up easily, and perceive adversity as permanent and overwhelming (Stoltz, 1997).

To explain how individuals respond to adversity, Stoltz introduced the CORE model, consisting of four dimensions:

1. Control

Control refers to the extent to which individuals believe they can influence or manage difficult situations. People with high control believe they can take constructive actions even when circumstances are unfavorable. They focus on finding solutions rather than feeling helpless. Students with high control are more likely to remain calm during examinations, adapt to academic pressure, and seek help when needed. In contrast, students with low control often feel powerless and lose confidence when facing academic or personal difficulties (Stoltz, 1997).

2. Ownership

Ownership refers to the degree to which individuals accept responsibility for dealing with adversity. It does not mean accepting blame for every problem but recognizing one's responsibility to take positive action toward solving it. Adolescents with high ownership actively seek solutions, learn from mistakes, and improve their performance instead of making excuses or blaming others. This characteristic promotes accountability, self-discipline, and continuous improvement (Stoltz, 1997).

3. Reach

Reach explains how far individuals allow adversity to influence different areas of their lives. Individuals with high AQ prevent one setback from affecting other aspects of their functioning. For example, a student who performs poorly in one examination continues to participate confidently in other subjects and extracurricular activities. On the other hand, students with low reach allow one failure to negatively affect their confidence, motivation, and relationships, resulting in broader academic and emotional problems (Stoltz, 1997).

4. Endurance

Endurance refers to how long individuals believe adversity and its consequences will last. High-AQ individuals view difficulties as temporary and believe that circumstances will improve through sustained effort. This optimistic perspective encourages persistence and resilience. Conversely, individuals with low endurance often perceive problems as permanent, leading to hopelessness, anxiety, and withdrawal from challenging situations (Stoltz, 1997).

Overall, Stoltz's AQ Theory emphasizes that the ability to manage adversity is a learnable competency. Educational institutions can enhance students' AQ by providing supportive learning environments, encouraging problem-solving skills, fostering positive attitudes, and teaching effective coping strategies. Developing AQ enables adolescents to improve academic performance, emotional well-being, leadership abilities, and lifelong success (Stoltz, 1997).

4.2 Resilience Theory

Resilience Theory explains how individuals successfully adapt and recover after experiencing adversity, trauma, stress, or significant life challenges. Rather than viewing resilience as a rare personality trait, modern researchers consider it a dynamic developmental process influenced by personal strengths and environmental support. One of the leading scholars in this area, Ann S. Masten (2001), described resilience as "ordinary magic," emphasizing that resilience develops through everyday protective systems such as caring families, supportive teachers, positive peer relationships, and effective schools (Masten, 2001).

Resilience enables adolescents to cope with academic failures, family difficulties, peer conflicts, and emotional stress while maintaining healthy psychological functioning. According to Resilience Theory, protective factors help individuals reduce the negative effects of risk factors. These protective factors

include positive self-esteem, emotional regulation, problem-solving skills, optimism, supportive relationships, and access to quality education (Masten, 2001).

Resilience Theory identifies several important components:

Protective Factors

Protective factors reduce the harmful effects of adversity. These include supportive parents, encouraging teachers, positive peer relationships, strong social support, effective communication skills, and a safe school environment. Schools that promote inclusive practices and emotional support strengthen students' resilience (Masten, 2001).

Risk Factors

Risk factors increase the likelihood of poor outcomes. These include poverty, family conflict, academic stress, bullying, discrimination, mental health issues, and lack of social support. However, resilience develops when protective factors successfully counterbalance these risks (Masten, 2001).

Positive Adaptation

A resilient individual continues functioning effectively despite facing adversity. Such students maintain academic engagement, emotional stability, and healthy relationships while learning valuable coping skills from difficult experiences (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Resilience and AQ are closely related but differ in focus. Resilience primarily emphasizes recovery and adaptation after adversity, whereas AQ emphasizes how individuals perceive, respond to, and manage adversity while it is occurring (Stoltz, 1997). Schools that foster resilience through counseling services, mentoring, inclusive classrooms, and positive teacher-student relationships indirectly contribute to developing students' Adversity Quotient.

4.3 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura (1997), explains human behavior as the result of continuous interaction among personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. This concept is known as reciprocal determinism, meaning that individuals both influence and are influenced by their surroundings (Bandura, 1997).

A central concept of Social Cognitive Theory is self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task or overcome challenges. According to Bandura (1997), people with strong self-efficacy approach difficult situations as opportunities to learn rather than as threats. They demonstrate greater motivation, persistence, confidence, and emotional control.

Bandura identified four major sources of self-efficacy:

Mastery Experiences

Successful completion of challenging tasks strengthens confidence and increases future persistence. Repeated successes encourage adolescents to believe they can overcome future obstacles (Bandura, 1997).

Vicarious Experiences

Observing peers or role models successfully overcome difficulties increases an individual's confidence that they can achieve similar success. Positive role models therefore play an important role in schools (Bandura, 1997).

Social Persuasion

Encouragement, constructive feedback, and positive reinforcement from teachers, parents, and peers enhance students' confidence and willingness to persist during challenges (Bandura, 1997).

Physiological and Emotional States

Individuals interpret emotional reactions such as anxiety, stress, or excitement when facing challenges.

Students who manage stress effectively generally exhibit stronger self-efficacy and better performance (Bandura, 1997).

Social Cognitive Theory has strong implications for AQ. Adolescents with high self-efficacy believe they can control outcomes, persist during setbacks, and develop effective coping strategies. These beliefs strengthen all four CORE dimensions of AQ by increasing confidence, responsibility, perseverance, and positive problem-solving (Bandura, 1997; Stoltz, 1997).

4.4 Growth Mindset Theory

Growth Mindset Theory, proposed by Carol S. Dweck (2006), suggests that intelligence, abilities, and talents are not fixed characteristics but can be developed through sustained effort, effective learning strategies, and persistence. Dweck distinguished between two types of mindsets: fixed mindset and growth mindset (Dweck, 2006).

Individuals with a fixed mindset believe intelligence is static and unchangeable. Consequently, they often avoid difficult tasks, fear failure, and become discouraged after setbacks. In contrast, individuals with a growth mindset believe abilities improve through practice and learning. They accept challenges, learn from criticism, and view mistakes as valuable opportunities for development (Dweck, 2006).

Growth Mindset Theory emphasizes several principles:

- Intelligence and abilities can be improved through continuous learning.
- Mistakes are valuable learning opportunities.
- Effort contributes significantly to success.
- Constructive feedback supports improvement.
- Persistence is essential for long-term achievement.

Students with a growth mindset display higher motivation, resilience, academic engagement, and perseverance. They are more willing to attempt challenging tasks and recover from failures because they believe improvement is possible (Dweck, 2006).

Growth mindset strongly complements AQ because both emphasize perseverance during adversity. Adolescents who believe they can improve are more likely to exercise control over challenges, take ownership of their actions, limit the negative reach of setbacks, and maintain endurance until success is achieved. Thus, fostering a growth mindset in schools contributes significantly to developing students' Adversity Quotient.

4.5 Grit Theory

Grit Theory, introduced by Angela Duckworth and colleagues (2007), defines grit as the combination of perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. According to the theory, successful individuals continue working consistently toward meaningful objectives despite failures, obstacles, boredom, or slow progress (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Duckworth argued that talent alone does not guarantee success. Instead, individuals who maintain sustained effort over long periods are more likely to achieve excellence. Grit involves two major components:

Consistency of Interest

Individuals maintain commitment to long-term goals without frequently changing direction. They remain focused despite distractions and temporary setbacks (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Perseverance of Effort

Gritty individuals continue working hard despite difficulties, failures, or delayed success. They demonstrate determination, discipline, and resilience over time (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Research has shown that grit predicts academic achievement, persistence in higher education, career success, and psychological well-being because individuals remain committed even when progress is slow (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Although AQ and grit are closely related, they are conceptually distinct. AQ primarily explains how individuals respond immediately to adversity using the CORE dimensions, whereas grit focuses on sustained perseverance and long-term commitment toward meaningful goals. In educational settings, students with both high AQ and high grit are more likely to overcome academic challenges, maintain motivation, and achieve long-term success because they effectively manage immediate obstacles while remaining committed to their future aspirations (Stoltz, 1997; Duckworth et al., 2007).

5. Adversity Quotient among Adolescents

Adolescence is characterized by rapid developmental changes that expose young people to numerous forms of adversity. Besides biological and emotional transitions, adolescents experience increasing academic expectations, social comparisons, peer influence, identity exploration, and family responsibilities. These experiences often generate stress that affects both academic performance and psychological well-being.

Modern adolescents also face unique challenges arising from technological advancements and changing societal expectations. Excessive use of social media, cyberbullying, digital addiction, online comparison, career uncertainty, and the pressure to excel academically have increased levels of anxiety and stress among secondary school students. Consequently, developing AQ has become increasingly important in helping adolescents navigate these challenges successfully.

Research indicates that students with higher AQ demonstrate:

- Better academic achievement
- Greater persistence during difficult tasks
- Higher intrinsic motivation
- Improved emotional regulation
- Stronger problem-solving abilities
- Better interpersonal relationships
- Lower levels of stress and anxiety
- Greater psychological well-being

Conversely, students with low AQ often experience academic burnout, reduced motivation, learned helplessness, avoidance of challenging tasks, and poor emotional adjustment.

Educational psychologists emphasize that adolescence provides an ideal period for developing AQ because cognitive maturity enables students to understand challenges, evaluate alternative solutions, and regulate emotional responses. Schools therefore play a vital role in nurturing AQ through supportive teaching practices, counseling services, and opportunities for experiential learning.

6. Educational Implications of Adversity Quotient (AQ)

The concept of **Adversity Quotient (AQ)** has significant implications for education because it focuses on developing students' ability to face difficulties, overcome setbacks, and continue working toward their goals. In today's competitive and rapidly changing educational environment, students frequently experience academic pressure, examination stress, peer conflicts, family problems, and uncertainty about their future. Therefore, educational institutions should not only aim to improve academic achievement but

also help learners build resilience, perseverance, emotional stability, and problem-solving skills. The following educational implications explain how AQ can be integrated into different aspects of education.

6.1 Curriculum Development

The school curriculum should go beyond academic knowledge and include opportunities for developing students' resilience and coping skills. Curriculum planners should integrate life skills education, social-emotional learning (SEL), stress management, decision-making, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence across different subjects and co-curricular activities. These skills enable students to respond positively to difficult situations and make informed decisions.

Project work, community service, role-playing, debates, and case studies can expose students to real-life challenges where they learn to analyze problems and develop practical solutions. Integrating reflective journals and classroom discussions also encourages students to understand their emotions and learn from their experiences.

Example:

A secondary school includes a weekly Life Skills period where students discuss topics such as examination stress, peer pressure, cyberbullying, and goal setting. Students work in groups to solve real-life situations and reflect on how they would respond positively. Such activities gradually strengthen their confidence and resilience.

6.2 Classroom Teaching

Teachers play a central role in developing AQ through their teaching practices. Instead of focusing only on memorization, teachers should adopt learner-centered approaches that actively involve students in the learning process. Strategies such as problem-based learning (PBL), project-based learning, collaborative learning, experiential learning, and inquiry-based learning encourage students to face challenges, think critically, and persist until they find solutions.

Teachers should create a classroom environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning rather than failures. Encouraging questioning, experimentation, and constructive discussions helps students develop confidence in handling difficult tasks.

Positive reinforcement, appreciation of effort, and constructive feedback further motivate students to continue working despite setbacks.

Example:

A mathematics teacher gives students a challenging real-life budgeting problem instead of a routine exercise. Although students initially struggle, they work in groups, discuss different strategies, and eventually solve the problem. The teacher praises their persistence and teamwork rather than only the correct answer, helping students understand that effort is an important part of learning.

6.3 Assessment Practices

Traditional assessment mainly measures academic performance through examinations. However, AQ emphasizes learning from mistakes and continuous improvement. Therefore, schools should adopt continuous and comprehensive assessment practices that evaluate not only knowledge but also students' problem-solving abilities, creativity, perseverance, collaboration, and self-reflection.

Formative assessment, portfolio assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment provide regular feedback that helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement. Constructive feedback encourages students to view failure as temporary and manageable rather than permanent.

Assessment practices should reward effort, progress, and improvement instead of focusing exclusively on final examination scores.

Example:

A science teacher asks students to maintain a portfolio documenting failed experiments, corrections made, and lessons learned. Students receive marks for reflection and improvement, helping them realize that learning involves experimentation and persistence.

6.4 Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counseling services are essential for helping students develop resilience and healthy coping strategies. School counselors should organize programmes on stress management, emotional regulation, time management, career planning, examination anxiety, self-esteem, and coping with failure.

Counselors can conduct individual and group counseling sessions for students experiencing academic difficulties, family issues, bullying, or emotional stress. They should also teach relaxation techniques, mindfulness practices, positive thinking, and goal-setting skills that improve students' emotional well-being.

Early identification of students facing repeated adversity enables timely intervention before problems become more serious.

Example:

Before board examinations, the school counseling department conducts workshops on managing exam anxiety through breathing exercises, positive self-talk, study planning, and relaxation techniques. Students report reduced anxiety and improved confidence during examinations.

6.5 Teacher Professional Development

Teachers themselves require training to nurture AQ among students effectively. Professional development programmes should include topics such as positive psychology, inclusive education, classroom management, student mental health, social-emotional learning, resilience education, and trauma-informed teaching.

Teachers should learn to identify signs of emotional distress, low motivation, learned helplessness, or chronic stress among students. Training should also provide practical classroom strategies for motivating struggling learners, encouraging persistence, and supporting diverse learning needs.

Professional learning communities can allow teachers to share successful classroom practices for building resilience and supporting students facing adversity.

Example:

A school organizes a workshop on Positive Psychology where teachers learn growth mindset strategies, positive feedback techniques, and methods for encouraging students who repeatedly perform poorly. Teachers later apply these techniques in their classrooms, resulting in improved student engagement and confidence.

6.6 Educational Leadership

School leaders have a major responsibility in creating an organizational culture that supports resilience and continuous learning. Principals and administrators should promote a school environment characterized by empathy, collaboration, innovation, mutual respect, psychological safety, and continuous improvement.

Educational leaders should encourage teachers to experiment with innovative teaching methods without fear of criticism. They should also establish systems that support student well-being, including counseling services, mentoring programmes, peer-support groups, and parent-school collaboration.

Policies should emphasize student development rather than punishment, encouraging learners to view setbacks as opportunities for growth. Leadership that models resilience during difficult situations inspires

both teachers and students.

Example:

Following poor school examination results, the principal avoids blaming teachers or students. Instead, the leadership team conducts collaborative review meetings, identifies learning gaps, provides additional academic support classes, and celebrates gradual improvements. This supportive approach motivates teachers and students to work together toward better outcomes.

Conclusion

The increasing complexity of modern education requires students not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop the psychological capacity to overcome adversity.

Integrating Adversity Quotient into educational practice helps schools prepare students not only for academic success but also for life's inevitable challenges. Curriculum reforms, learner-centred teaching, continuous assessment, effective counselling, teacher training, and supportive educational leadership collectively create learning environments where students develop resilience, perseverance, emotional intelligence, and confidence. By nurturing AQ, educational institutions can produce lifelong learners who are capable of adapting to change, overcoming obstacles, and contributing positively to society.

Strengthening adolescents' Adversity Quotient can contribute not only to improved academic performance but also to the development of resilient, confident, and socially responsible citizens capable of thriving in an increasingly uncertain world.

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