



Association between Perceived Social Support and Academic Performance in Public Sector Universities of Lahore, Pakistan

Sadaf Shafique¹, Mubasher M Kamran², Muhammad Roman³, Aashir Khalil⁴

Abstract

Social support is considered to be an important element in a person's life. The present research was designed to investigate the relationship between perceived social support and academic performance for the students of undergraduate programs in public sector universities in Lahore. Sample size was determined through use of a sampling formula. A sample of 400 students was collected through multistage random sampling from four universities of different categories. Berlin Scale of Social Support (BSSS) was used to measure social support that a student perceives. For the measurement of students' academic performance, Cumulative Grade point average (CGPA) was recorded. The data was statistically analyzed through Pearson's correlation coefficient test. The results indicated significant association between perceived instrumental support and the perception of need that a person feels for gaining social support. Negative correlation was found between students' overall perception of social support along with perceived emotional support and their academic performance.

Keywords: Social support, Academic performance

1. Introduction

Social support refers to the availability of social resources in the life of a person. It involves people and groups who are available for a person to provide love, affection, guidance, care and assistance in hours of need. Social support comes primarily from the family, peer and significant others. It serves as a source of sense of belongingness that works as a back hold in the life of a person. Social support comes has different forms including received social support, perceived social support, emotional support and instrumental support (Zhou, 2014).

Social support is the affection and warmth that a person receives from the primary social networks including family, friends, siblings and significant others. It gives individual a feeling of connectedness (Rees & Freeman, 2007), self-esteem (Li et al., 2020), self-motivation (Tezci, Sezer, & Aktan, 2015) and self-worth which serve as an anchor for a person's self-confidence (Kumar, Lal, & Bhuchar, 2014). Social support is proven to be necessary for a person as it is significant for physical (Wang, Wu, & Liu, 2003), psychological (Sood & Bakhshi, 2012), emotional (Rami, 2013) and mental health (Harandi, Taghinaseb, & Nayeri, 2017).

Albrecht and Adelman (1987) refer to social support as verbal and non-verbal contact between giver and receiver that helps in decreasing insecurities that a person has about the self, situations and the relationships. It also increases the perception of self-control within the person.

Barnes and Duck (1994) indicated that social support is not just limited to hard time and the moments when a person needs shoulder to cry. It is equally important during routine contacts of a person within his social networks as the social support and the level of comfort will be higher if the support is available in routine life and the person will be confident and comfortable while engaging in regular activities of normal life.

Social support is helpful in enhancing self-belief (Oktary, Marjohan, & Syahniar, 2019), adjustment (Sterle, Vervoort, & Verhofstadt, 2018), establishing and achieving goals (Fort & Marariu, 2016), academic achievements (Seon et al., 2019) and academic adjustments (Aldrup et al., 2018). Social support from family and peer groups is proven to be most beneficial and effective for a person (Suwinyattichaiorn & Johnson, 2020). Family is the most significant primary social groups that provides strongest anchor for sense of security and belonging for individuals and helps them in accomplishing their goals (Cai & Lian, 2022).

Silbereisen (1994) provided three major domains i.e. warmth, behavioral control and psychological autonomy through which the primary groups including family and friends provide social support. These dimensions are effective in encouraging conformity to social norms and less delinquent behavior. These qualities help the person in the development of enhanced commitment towards personal goals and improvement in interpersonal skills (Jeong, 2019).

Life is a blend of a variety of experiences that affect person both positively and negatively. These experiences can be helpful in improving a person's well-being and as well as level of self-motivation. Social support from different social networks can serve as the most promising motivational factor for in person's life (Rahman, Bhuttah, & You, 2020).

A supportive family can help a person in attainment of study goals as it can have positive affect on the attitude of a student towards study and school. Students in their early college years have reported that the parents are the first people they think of whenever they face a difficult situation in academic setting and their presence and moral support help them in coping up with the stress that they face within the academic setting (Mardiana, 2018).

Social support has two major dimensions namely received social support and perceived social support. Received social support refers to the actual and real social support that a person receives from family, friends and significant

¹ M.Phil Scholar, School of Sociology, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

² Lecturer, School of Sociology, Minhaj University Lahore, Pakistan

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Jhang, Pakistan

⁴ M.Phil Scholar, School of Sociology, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

others. While, perceived social support is the perception that a person has about the social support which that person receives. Perceived social support is the feeling and sensitivity of a person towards the availability of social support. There are four forms of social support out of which the emotional social support and instrumental social support have been included in the current study.

The emotional social support refers to the support that people receive in the form of love, affection and empathy. The emotional social support comes with a feeling within a person that someone is available to listen, to provide advice, moral guidance, to help in emotionally challenging situations and to provides shoulder when needed (Boone, et al., 2021).

Instrumental social support is the support that involves material and physical support in form of goods and services including the physical items or money. It is the most agreed upon form of social support by most scholars. It is the financial support given by others to help in the time of crisis. Perceived instrumental support is the perception of an individual about the support that is received by that person in difficult situations. It is the support that is needed the most while facing any problem (Sasia et al., 2020).

The current study aims to identify the relationship of perceived social support on academic performance of students. The academic performance is the measurement of the level of understanding and learning of a student during his/her stay in the academic setting.

Academic performance of a student refers to how well a student is accomplishing academic goals. To analyze the academic accomplishments, the grade point average of students (CGPA) is commonly used as a scale of measurement. Although class efficiency and standardized test results are also used to get quick results (Mayasari, Arafat, & Setiawan, 2021). The relationship of social support and academic performance is important to measure because academic performance is one among the most important factors that influence the life of individual and future career orientations. Social support is proven as a buffer against academic stress and a positively affecting variable for academic adjustment (Lasarte et al., 2020; Sadoughi & Hesampour, 2016). The findings of the current study will aid in understanding the variables which influence undergraduate students' academic performance.

2. Literature Review

Social support is a significant variable for various academic factors that affect a student's academic life. Cristescu and Baban (2022) analyzed the effect of social support on academic adjustment. They indicated positive mediating and moderting role of social support by parents, teachers and classmates on academic adjustment of a student. Ferguson and Zimmer (2021) demonstrated a positive correlation between peer support and academic achievement whereas a negative effect was found between peer support and academic engagement.

Lian (2008) investigated the relationship between family functioning and social support on the self-esteem of students. The study was conducted in Malaysia on 378 students. The analysis provided evidence for the significant relationship of family functioning and social support with self-esteem. Another study in Malaysia suggested that social support has significant negative relationship with psychological problems as higher social support levels resulted in lower psychological problems.

Mishra (2020) did a systematic review of association among social support, social capital, social networks and academic success. The review revealed that the academic achievement and success is based on several social factors. The literature provided evidence for the existence of significant effect of religious and moral attachment, social bonding, and the support of family, friends and faculty on the academic success of the students.

In a study conducted by Safeer, Shah and Rehman (2021) in Hazara division, the analysis showed positive relationship between social support and academic achievement while self-esteem and shyness was found to be negatively associated with academic achievement. Although, the social support from family has been indicated as a significant factor which positively affect self-esteem of a student (Li et al., 2020). Family support significantly helps in reducing the effects of depression and anxiety in a college student (Shao et al., 2020).

The level of social support differs for both genders as the level of social support from mother and father is different in certain settings. The social support and involvement of fathers and mother in education is unique in their own patterns. The social support from mother is found to be more available in informal patterns. However the social support from fathers is usually in formal patterns. The involvement of mothers in social support is higher and more significant than that of fathers' (Sharabi & Marom-Golan, 2018).

Kamel (2018) elaborated that social support is significantly related to self-esteem and academic adjustment whereas academic adjustment was negatively correlated with academic overload. It was revealed that social support and academic achievement were positively correlated while self-esteem worked as a significant mediator in their relationship. The relationship of social support and emotional exhaustion was also found to be mediated by self-esteem of individual (Li et al., 2018). The self-esteem is indicative of higher academic success of students in academic life (Duraku & Hoxha, 2018).

From a secondary data analysis of national survey of China, it was found that academic resilience was indicated to be linked to all available sources of social support for young adults of low-income households. It was also revealed that for low-income household students, peer support and academic adaptability was significant for higher academic achievements (Fang, Chan & Kalogeropoulos, 2020). A study conducted in Malaysia showed a

significant negative correlation between social support and academic performance for all high achieving male and female students (Hushiari, Rosli & Khodabakhsh, 2019).

Emotional intelligence of a student was investigated to be an effecting factor for academic performance that was linked to perceived social support and academic adjustment directly or indirectly. It was found that emotional intelligence is indirectly related to academic adjustment through psychological adjustment. Whereas the emotional intelligence was also found indirectly linked to academic performance through both engagement coping and academic adjustment patterns of students (Perera & DiGiacomo, 2015).

As a student moves from school to the college and then to the university: family, peer group, teachers or colleagues are the groups that affect a person's social goals and self-assessment (Hatteberg, 2020). In a study by Kamel (2018) conducted on university students of 1st year, a little correlation was found between school adjustment and overload. The association between perceived social support and self-efficacy, however, was found to be significantly positive.

Social support also plays an important role in coping up with problems that are faced in academic settings such as bullying. Bullying is a serious issue faced by students in academic life. Social support is significant in suppressing the bullying behavior in students and enhancing the chances of enhanced academic performance which leads towards achievements (Xiong et al., 2020). Social support helps in emergence of hopes regarding future of the student. Teachers' involvement and support is found to be most significant in academic achievement (Fraser, Bryce, & Jenkins, 2022).

The teachers' support is effective in academic achievement in relationship with teachers' competence. The higher levels of teachers' competence results in higher level of academic engagement and improved learning behavior of students (Shair & Majeed, 2020; Shair et al., 2021; Ruhendi & Marta, 2022). It is an interesting factor that social support is significant for the higher competence level of teachers as well. Statistics have revealed the fact that social support is significantly correlated with work engagement and efficiency of teacher (Minghui et al., 2018). The social support from fellow students is essential for a teacher to enhance the self-efficiency (Kassis et al., 2019).

Support networks are found to be associated with academic life. Social support networks include persons who are available in difficult times for friendly and moral support. They are the people who listen to the person during difficult times. Academic support network on the other hand refers to the people who serve as source of guidance and moral support during academic journey of a person. Moreover, those networks can turn into social support network. These networks help in increasing academic self-efficiency. These networks enable the support seeker to become support giver in the future (Zander et al., 2018; Sajid & Ali, 2018; Bibi & Ali, 2021).

The positive impact of parents' expectations has been studied, however studying the negative effect of these expectations on students' mental health and failure is also important. A study in Hong Kong investigated the impact of parents' expectations on academic performance and depression among secondary school students. The examination proved that expectations are positively linked to academic success of students but it was also proven to be a significant cause of depression among students. The high expectations of parents cause children to fall in trap of long lasting depression to fulfill those expectations (Ma, Siu, & Tse, 2018; Haider & Ali, 2015).

Nyadanu et al., (2017) stated that no significantly visible relationship was found between perceived social support and academic achievement in nursing students during their study. Another research on students in Abilene Christine University revealed interesting results. Social support was proven to be a buffering factor in relationship of stress with academic achievement. However, no direct relationship was indicated between social support and academic achievement. Only a marginally positive correlation between social support and academic achievement was found among female students (Bisson 2017; Kassem et al., 2019; Roussel et al., 2021; Senturk & Ali, 2021). A few studies have shown that social support is positively correlated with academic achievement whereas some studies are showing no significant relationship between these variables. The relationship is still ambiguous. The results of current study will provide insight into the relationship between these variables.

3. Theoretical framework

The current study is based on the attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1979). It serves as a paradigm for explaining the close interrelationships. Bowlby described that emotional attachment is a person's own perception and understanding of the supportive relationship provided by his/her primary groups and caregivers. The attachment and support of relationship grow up and establish more strongly with the passage of time. As the relationship becomes more and more tied up, the individual becomes more connected.

It is reported that when a long lasting relationship is broken or become distant, the children will show signs of distress and anxiety (Walsh et al., 2019). Literature has proven that the confidence, competency and social skills are developed through secure attachments and strongly built relationships from caregivers of children in their early years of life (Holt, Mattanah, & Long, 2018). The relationship of perceived social support from all groups on the academic performance of university students will be measured in current study under the context of attachment theory.

3.1. Hypothesis

Following hypotheses have been formulated for the current research.

- i. Perceived social support does not affect the academic performance.
- ii. Perceived emotional social support does not affect the academic performance.
- iii. Perceived instrumental social support does not affect the academic performance.
- iv. Need for social support does not affect the academic performance.
- v. Support seeking does not affect academic performance.

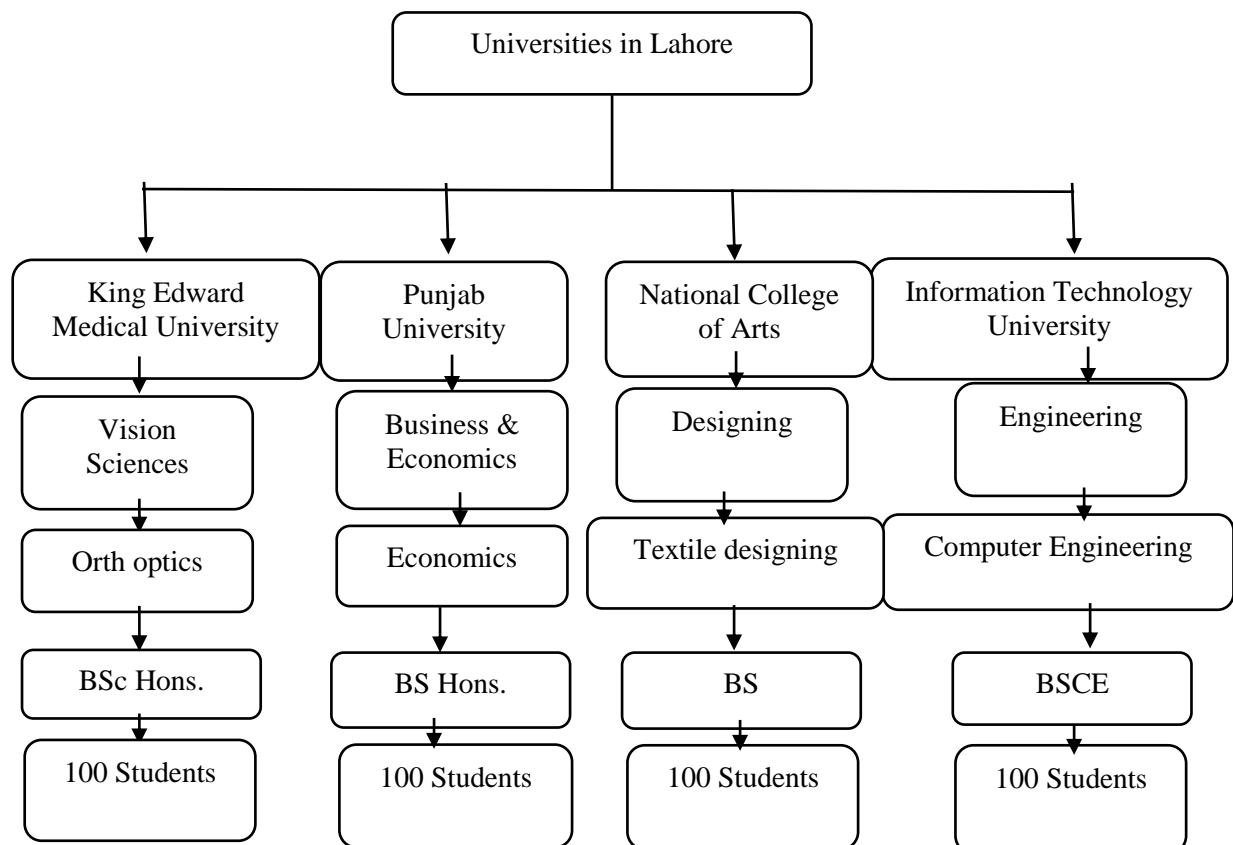
4. Method

The present research is quantitative in nature. Data was collected through a close ended questionnaire in a cross-sectional survey. The target population for the current research was comprised of students enrolled in undergraduate programs of public sector universities of Lahore city. The present study is quantitative in nature.

4.1. Sampling Procedure

Sample size was 400 which was determined with the use of Taro Yamini formula. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the participants from different universities in the city. At first stage, universities in Lahore were divided into 4 sub-categories namely medical universities, general universities, science and technology universities and arts related universities. At second stage, one university was selected from each category on random basis. Subsequent stages during the sampling phase included random selection of departments first and then selection of the classes. Data was collected from 100 students from each university. Information of students was formally obtained from the relevant departments. Formal approval was obtained from the relevant bodies before data collection. Sampling procedure is presented in the figure hereunder.

Figure 1. Stages of Sampling Procedure



4.2. Tool of Data Collection

The Berlin Scale of Social support (BSSS) was used as a tool for the measurement of perceived social support. The tool was 17 item questionnaire designed for the measurement of perceived social support (PSS) with four sub scales including perceived emotional support (PES), perceived instrumental support (PIS), need for support (NS) and support seeking (SS). Each item of the questionnaire had responses based on four point Likert scale. The scale options were strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree with coding from 4 to 1 respectively. The participants' cumulative grade point average (CGPA) served as an indicator of academic performance.

4.3. Pilot Test

The pre testing of questionnaire was conducted on 30 participating from a randomly selected public sector university in Lahore. The participants were within the age range of 19 to 24 years. The sample of pilot test included

16 male (53%) and 14 (47%) female students. The data collected from pilot test was analyzed in Stata MP 16 software and the results of Cronbach alpha reliability test was 0.81.

4.4. Participants

This research was designed for the students of public sector universities in Lahore city. The study included 400 participants. The sample included enrolled undergraduate students of third semester or above as information regarding assessment was not accessible for the students of first and second semesters in majority of the departments. Study sample included 50% males and 50% female students. No questionnaire was reported to be filled by a person of third gender. The demographic profile of the participants is shown in table 1.

4.5. Analysis

In this study, perceived social support was operated as independent variable while dependent variable was academic performance. The data collected was analyzed in Stata MP 16 software. The correlation analysis was conducted to study the relationship of variables explained in hypotheses.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants (N=400)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Demographic profile of Respondents		
1. Gender		
Male	200	50
Female	200	50
2. Age		
20 or below years old	82	20.5
21 years old	107	26.7
22 years old	101	25.2
23 years old	78	19.5
24 and above years old	32	8.1
3. Residential background		
Urban	271	67.8
Rural	129	32.3
4. Current stay status		
Day scholar	265	66.3
Hostel	135	33.8
5. Semester		
3 rd & 4 th	190	47.5
5 th & 6 th	134	33.5
7 th & 8 th	76	19

5. Results

The correlation analysis was used to conduct the analysis on the association of social support and academic achievement. Academic achievement and perceived social support was found to be negatively correlated, according to the value of Pearson correlation coefficient which was -0.0166. However, the association was shown to be favorable in terms of the need for support which is 0.0277 and instrumental social support which is 0.0012. The analysis proved negative correlation in perceived emotional support as the value of Pearson correlation was -0.0319. The results of this research indicated no significant correlation between the perception of student for social support and their academic performance. The null hypothesis was proven correct for the relationship between perceived emotional social support and academic performance.

6. Discussion

The research was aimed to analyze the effect of perceived social support on the academic performance of students. The study was conducted on the students of undergraduate programs in public sector universities of Lahore city. The data was collected from four different universities based on their categories which were Medical Universities, Arts Universities, Science and Technology Universities and General Universities with equal portion of sample from each category.

The sample was based on 400 participants. The sampling was based on multi-stage random sampling technique with four stages. One university was selected from each category respectively. Then from each university, one

sample faculty was chosen randomly. After that stage, one department was selected from the selected faculties. Every department offered varying numbers of undergraduate programs; hence one undergraduate program was selected in next stage. At the final stage, 100 students were selected from each program. The sample was collected on the basis of proportionate sampling during the final stage. Only those students were included in study who had already passed two semesters as CGPA was not available for the students of first two semesters in majority of the departments in the selected universities. That was done because inclusion of CGPA was the required in the current study to measure the academic performance.

The study was based on five hypothesis that were related to the overall perceived social support and its four related dimensions to academic performance. The data was collected through Berlin scale of social support (BSSS). The questionnaire was adapted and certain variables were added according to research requirements. The tool has already proven valid for the perceived social support variable. For the reliability testing, a sample of 30 students was selected in pilot study. The reliability was tested and proven for the current study as the value of Cronbach alpha was 0.81. The questionnaire included four domains of perceived social support including perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, need for support and support seeking. The sum of scores of all four domains was used as the overall score of perceived social support.

The demographic variables included were age, gender, religion, residential background, current stay status, CGPA, faculty, department and semester of the participating students. The data was analyzed in Stata MP 16 software. The Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between the variables and test hypotheses.

It was hypothesized that there would be association between perceived social support and the student's academic performance. It was also hypothesized that the domains of perceived social support i.e. perceived emotional support, perceived instrumental support, need of support and support seeking would relate to the overall academic performance of university students. The results of the study provided no significant correlation between the perception of student for social support and academic performance. The null hypothesis was proven for the relationship of perceived emotional social support and academic performance. The results of this study are in line with previous research (Zhiming et al., 2018).

A significant association was proven for subscales of social support including perceived instrumental support and need for support. The findings of the study match with the findings that have been presented in the some literature on social support. It is found in literature that the perception of emotional social support has least significant impact on students' academic achievement (Li et al., 2018). However, perception of instrumental social support and support needed by a student has a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Alghamdi, et al., 2020; Bailey, Drury & Grandy, 2019; Li & Carroll, 2019; Martinez, et al., 2020).

Table 2. Correlation of perceived social support and its sub-scales with academic performance

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. PSS	-	-	-	-	-	-0.0166
2. PES	-	-	-	-	-	-0.0319
3. PIS	-	-	-	-	-	0.0012
4. NS	-	-	-	-	-	0.0277
5. SS	-	-	-	-	-	-0.0233
6. Academic Performance	-0.0166	-0.0319	0.0012	0.0277	-0.0233	-

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the association of perceived social support and academic performance. The correlation analysis showed negative relationship between perceived social support and academic performance. The results are in favor of the null hypothesis which means that the students' academic performance does not have any relationship with the perceived social support. The current study provides evidence that perceived social support does not have any effect on the academic performance of students. Whereas, two domains of perceived social support which are perceived instrumental support and need for support are positively correlated with academic performance. The researchers would like to acknowledge the geographical limitation of the current study. Further studies in different social-spatial contexts in future should be conducted to further clarify the relationship between social support and academic performance of adolescents.

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