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A Study of the Psychological Factors Resulting in High and Low Academic Performance of Public Sector University Students

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the causes of psychological factors of high and low academic performance of public sector university students of District Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Previous literature was reviewed to examine the issue and design the research tools. To explore the causes, major efforts in this research were made to determine the factors of students' low academic performance. Using Convenience sampling technique, a sample of 556 university students studying at the bachelor's level (4 Years Degree Program) were selected from the public sector universities of District Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan for this study. Questionnaires were developed in light of the objectives of the study and responses were collected from the selected sample accordingly. The study's findings showed that high achievers are less likely to attend tuitions and have a clearer vision for their futures than low achievers. The t-test results showed that high achievers have a higher internal academic locus of control, higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of examination anxiety, and a more positive outlook on learning than low achievers. The analysis revealed a statistically significant beneficial relationship between academic success, study habits, motivation, and self-esteem.

Keywords: Academic Success; Psychological factors; High Achievers; Low Achievers; Academic Performance

1. Introduction

Teachers, policymakers, and students have long been interested in the psychological and social backgrounds of high and low academic performers. It is also an important area of study for psychologists. Identifying characteristics shared by high and low achievers' sheds light on the large performance gap that persists even among students from similar families and socioeconomic backgrounds who take the same number of advanced courses and have comparable standardized test scores. It has been demonstrated that the interaction of psycho-social factors has a significant impact on how well a student performs in the university. The psychological and social factors mentioned above can have varying effects on a student's academic performance. Previous research revealed that the distinction between high and low performers can be traced back to different levels of psycho-social variables. Students who have good study habits, families who support them, are self-motivated, do not get nervous before tests, have confidence, and feel like they have some control over their lives can perform well in the university academic examinations. The existing body of knowledge lends credence to the idea that individual differences in students' psycho-social circumstances are the major cause of their academic performance inequalities. A high Grade Point Average (GPA) indicates that the student understands the fundamentals of certain subjects in depth (Reardon et al., 2007). Academic performance tests are used by educators to assess their students' performance in course material. The outcomes of these exams serve as the student's final assessment of his or her knowledge and abilities. Teacher-created examinations, GPAs, and course grades are all indicators of academic success (Corsini & Auerback, 1987). Grades are frequently used in universities to show where a student stands in relation to the fellow students and the standard assigned marks. The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) is used as a metric of academic success at the majority of Pakistani universities. Based on their overall grades, students are classified as high or low performers. Scholarship recipients are typically chosen based on their academic performance. It is a requirement for many jobs in the real world. Therefore, GPA is widely regarded as a reliable indicator of academic success. People frequently misunderstand the concept of 'low performers'. People frequently believe that students who do not perform well in university are not as intelligent as their peers. Students with high and low academic achievement do not necessarily have vastly different levels of innate talent (Sorenson,1948; Mayya & Krishna Rao, 2004). To put it another way, a high performer is a student who accomplishes far more than one might expect from someone of his or her intelligence. Students who perform well in university outperform their peers and secure higher grades and test scores as compared to their peers. Low academic achievement indicates that a student did not perform well. Low achievers struggle in all academic subjects. In university, low performers are ranked lower than their normative group. Students who do poorly in university do not realize their full potential (Sorenson, 1948; Phares et al., 2004). This study contrasts high and low achievers in terms of the psycho-social factors influencing their academic performance. It also considers how these factors interact with one another. People who perform well in university are compared to those who do not, and the differences between gender and other factors in their backgrounds are investigated. According to research, women tend to underestimate their abilities and look within to determine why they succeed or fail. Moreover,

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women have lower self-esteem and are more anxious when taking tests (Arkes & Garske, 1982). The few studies that have looked into gender differences have yielded a variety of results. Their family situations have a significant impact on how motivated they are to face and overcome the challenges women face on their path to self-actualization. According to some research, people who perform well in university and those who do not have very different family backgrounds, social classes, and career goals (Kurtz & Swenson, 1951; Nuttall, 1987 & Adams, 1972). The study compares those who perform well in university with those who do not, as well as how their families and societies differ. The socioeconomic status of the student, the size and number of his or her family, the education and job of the student's parents, and the order of the student's siblings and parents are all considered in this investigative research. It also discusses their objectives and how tuition affects their academic performance at university. Additional education has been linked to academic success. The economic status of a student's family has a significant impact on how well the student performs in university. Students from low-income families have a lesser vocabulary and do not possess much intellectually stimulating material at home, according to research. It is inspiring to note that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds succeed in university, despite obstacles such as a lack of funds and uneducated parents. Middle-class parents have high expectations for their children and work hard to help them in acquiring quality education. Middle-class parents model good behavior for their children. Their family places a high value on education and reading, and they actively encourage their children to participate. Books, encyclopedias, records, puzzles, and computers are just a few of the resources available to parents to help their children develop intellectually. Middle-class parents are more likely to take their children to libraries, museums, and on educational field trips. Children from middle-class families are expected to excel academically, whereas children from lower-income families are expected to behave well and listen to adults (Knapp & Woolverton, 1995). It has also been discovered that middle-class children have more intellectually stimulating materials at home, which increases their likelihood of learning advance questions and quizzes over the summer. Students from low-income families are more likely to forget what they learned in college over the summer because they do not have much academic material at home (Thompson et al., 1992). Students who live in crowded, cluttered homes with few books, toys, or other ways to stimulate their minds are at a disadvantage in school. These factors make it difficult for them to succeed in university (Sorenson, 1948). Educated parents think beyond, not only compel their children to study, but also encourage and motivate their children to perform well in school; they can also assist them in exams and tests preparations. Several studies demonstrate the importance of relation between a person's family and its success. Most of the time, children from smaller families outperform children from larger families on standardized tests (Eysenck & Cookson, 1970; Schachter, 1974). Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between the order in which student were born and his or her academic performance. Human psychology studies show that firstborn children perform well in life. People who are the first in their family to be born are frequently ambitious, successful, and well-known. The majority of second children are imaginative and friendly. Most of the time, children in the middle feel compelled to compete with their older siblings. They are pleasant and get along well with others. The youngest child enjoys life, but he or she is spoiled, requires a lot of assistance, and is entertaining to be around. Similarly, he has not done anything noteworthy in school. In many ways, unique and mentally sharp children are similar to firstborns. Such child excels in school because he or she is extremely motivated (Corsini & Auerback, 1987; Santrock, 2003, Phares et al., 2004).

1.1. Significance of the Study

The current study will be useful for teachers, peers, and parents in determining how to assist, guide, and support low academic performers in order to improve their achievement level. Based on the findings of this study, teachers can devise need-based strategies to improve students of low academic performance. It will assist teachers in knowing that extent of support that the student requires. It will motivate teachers to facilitate students by having a trust level that can lead of improved performance of the students. It will assist stakeholders in putting the proposed strategies for improving students' academic performance with low academic grades into action. The study will help future students because they will benefit from it, and teachers and parents will be able to help their children. This research would assist educators in determining how to use signs of psycho-social determinants to predict how well a student will perform in school and how their various levels lead to high and low academic achievements. Students who struggle academically require assistance in overcoming obstacles such as inefficient study material, a lack of motivation to succeed, test anxiety, low self-esteem, or external beliefs that help them explain their failures. This study would assist students who are struggling in universities and other academic institutions of various levels in determining what they can do. Their low grades demonstrate a significant gap between what was expected and what they accomplished during their studies.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To pinpoint the underlying social factors contributing to students' low academic performance.
- To probe the psychological factors contributing to students' low academic performance.
- To identify the academic factors contributing to students' low academic performance.
- To trace the physical factors underlying students' high academic performance.

2. Literature Review

The university's main goal is to make the world a better place by producing educated people, introduce new technologies, and perform groundbreaking research. First-year university students may have a lot to experience in the coming year as they try new things, meet new people, and form new bonds. To maintain a high level of academic success in university, student must adjust to new personal, intellectual, and social expectations, learn new ways of doing things, and complete courses. Undergraduate students learn a lot about themselves and grow in very beneficial ways. University students have numerous options for fulfilling their academic, social, and interpersonal responsibilities (Stewart et al., 1997). Students frequently spend time with a wide range of people, which may be beneficial to their mental and emotional development. Students at universities learn new things, but they may also face problems that affect how well they perform in class (Choi et al., 2007). This usually occurs when they are attempting to achieve a certain level of academic milestone, which is determined by how well they perform on required coursework, oral presentations, and written exams. The Grade Point Average (GPA) is the sum of all students' grades in all subjective courses that comprise their overall grade. Students who attend university away from home experience more stress and have lower semester GPAs. It may be the result of having to assume more responsibility at hostels. When deciding what to do after finishing university, most people agree that a student's GPA is the most important factor to consider (Sinha et al., 2007). The GPA is used to assess a student's academic performance at universities in Pakistan and elsewhere. Therefore, doing well in university can lead to a better future with more educational and career options and larger long-term rewards (Ang & Huan, 2006). Students' mental and physical health may suffer if they feel pressured to perform well in school. Sarkhel (2009) identified higher expectations, more exams, poor working conditions, overcrowded lecture halls, and poor relationships with peers and teachers as causes of student stress. Students were also stressed because they needed additional money, study time, and resources to complete their assignments. As a result, students are less likely to make new friends or take on new academic challenges (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001).

Depression is another common issue that can harm university students' health (Lyubomirsky et al., 2003). The study of depression among university students is important because some lifelong psychological disorders occur as a result of the demanding nature of university years. Previous research has found that the health of university students is deteriorating. Depression rates are higher in comparison to peers worldwide (Bruce, 2009). Therefore, depression has been identified as a significant phenomenon among university students, affecting academic performance and, in extreme cases, leading to suicidal attempts (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005). In light of the foregoing, mental health experts and campus health services should take practical steps to address students' psychological health concerns. Depressed people typically have a history of anxiety symptoms, which include unpleasant feelings of fear and concern, uneasiness, worry, fatigue, restlessness, concentration difficulties, muscle tension, and dread (Hemmings & Bouras, 2016). Anxiety is a natural part of human nature and can serve as a motivator in dealing with various life challenges. However, in severe cases of anxiety, it can have a significant impact on daily functions and interfere with individuals' average performance (Hartley & Phelps, 2012). When anxiety takes an extreme form, students in higher education institutions experience severe problems such as their hands freezing, shaking, their minds going blank, and a variety of problems during exams or tests (Afolayan et al., 2013).

3. Concept of Low Academic Performance

3.1. Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is a term that can be used interchangeably with 'academic performance', 'examination performance', 'educational attainments', and 'educational success'. In contrast, the term 'academic achievement' frequently appears in the current study because it specifically refers to grades or marks obtained in external examinations. In other words, 'academic performance' refers to students' outstanding participation in classroom activities during the learning process (Heather & April, 2009).

3.2. Standards of Academic Achievement

The standard levels of achievement that are expected of students taking a certain course are meant to help teachers report to students and parents in a way that is consistent. The goal of 'achievement standards' is to give 'an expectation of the quality of learning that students should typically show about the content by a certain point in their university (that is, how well they understand, how much they know, and how well they can do things)' (Berry & Adamson, 2011).

3.3. Low Academic Achievement

The goal of the reporting framework is to make sure that the categories used to describe the quality of achievement for each "A-E" grade for academic standards are consistent. The 'five-point scale' is supposed to show how well a student has met the achievement standard for a certain year of university. For example, if a student gets a C or higher, they have met the standard for that year/stage. A grade of C would indicate a satisfactory level of achievement, while an A would indicate an outstanding level of achievement. Conversely, a grade of D or E would suggest that follow-up is required and further investigation by teachers, students and parents might be needed' (Berry & Adamson, 2011). The phrase 'The author uses the term 'low achievement' to describe or define the below-average performance of African American men, which is often less than a 'C grade' on average in university. Using the statistical Bell Curve, half of all students who score below the 50th percentile or average are

automatically considered low performers' (Ford & Moore, 2013). 'Low achievements' does not indicate anything about a student's academic skills. This label means that a student's grades or test scores are below average' (Ford & Moore, 2013).

3.4. Stressors and Students

Many students/learners think about stressors related to academic work, and these are the most common ones. Student stress usually comes from while pushing hard to meet deadlines at the university (Murphy & Archer, 1996). Researchers have found that giving students too much academic work makes them stressed (Reisberg, 2000). Fear of failing an exam is another serious problem that is linked to stress. Feelings of panic make people work harder and do things better than they did before (Schafer, 1996). This fear of failing can sometimes lead to physical, mental, and emotional pressures. People's stress levels are not affected by how well they manage their time, and their beliefs about how much control they have over time are one of the main reasons for their stress. Hardy and Fazey (2003) said that students who don't know how to manage their time could have trouble sleeping, which would make it harder for them to handle stressful situations.

3.5. Stressors and Examinations Phase

Abouserie (1994) stated that examination is the most critical stressor among students. Exams-related stress has various symptoms, i.e., nausea, modification in the patterns related to eating, sleeplessness or restlessness, and indigestion. Moreover, he explained that once the first exam started, most students felt less stressed. It refers to the idea that taking an exam can cause stress even if the exam itself does not. Gadzella et al. (1998) also observed that nervousness, uneasiness, and fear are associated with exams or tests that create physical and emotional reactions rather than the examination/test itself.

3.6. Stressors and Students Transition at Institute Level

Most of the students may find it hard to adjust to a new learning environment because they have to leave their families and sometimes travel far from where they live (Fisher, 1994). Additional academic work and a heavier load make it hard to finish on time. Some of the students may have just moved away from home for the first time and need to keep up their grades (Ross et al., 1999). Radcliffe and Lester (2003) found that when students are put in a new environment, they are more stressed out about making new friends and peers. Giving people social support is a very important part of helping them deal with their problems. The same thing can cause stress at any time if students do not deal with it in a right manner.

3.7. Stressors Related to Financial Issues and Academic Achievements

The way a student lives and manage his or her finances can be a source of stress in his life. Even though stress problems only last for a short time, they can have bad effects on people (Schafer, 1996). A study performed in London found a link between financial problems and how people feel about themselves mentally (Roberts et al., 1999). Researchers have found that when people do not have enough money, it can make the bad effects of stress, which is usually connected to the learning process (Foster & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). Therefore, many students work part-time to shoulder their expenses. Such students are unable to concentrate on their academic work and hence their performance suffer.

3.8. Stress and Academic Achievement

Bennett (2003) found that there was a strong link between stress and students doing worse in school. When students are stressed, they do not perform well in academic examinations. On the other hand, low levels of stress can help students perform better in assessments and quizzes (Stevenson & Harper, 2006). From the students' point of view, having more stress hurts and affects their academic performance. It made it hard for the students to do their schoolwork (Vlisides et al., 1994; Sloboda, 1990).

3.9. Anxiety and Academic Achievements

Anxiety is one of the most common and strong predictors of how well a student will perform in academic setting. Researchers have found that anxiety has a negative effect on how well students do in academic institution. Robb (2005) argues that a negative link was found between cognitive anxiety and how well students perform in school or how well they did in their work. When compared to physical anxiety, Hardy and Fazey (1988) found that students with anxiety about their ability to think have a significant and positive relationship with how well they perform in school. Hamzah's (2007) study showed that people or students with a lot of anxiety get low grades or marks on tests. In the same way, Luigi et al. (2007) predicted and found that high levels of anxiety are linked to poor or low academic performance. Usen et al. (2009) said that bad life experiences make people more anxious, which makes them do worse in school. So, if a person or student has positive experiences during his or her educational phase, it will lower his or her level of anxiety, which will help him or her perform well in school.

4. Research Methodology

The primary objective of this research was to find out what high and low academic performers have in common from a psychological point of view. This chapter elaborate about research design. In order to collect data, a detailed procedure that describes the population, sample, and instrument was thoroughly followed and has be laid down here.

4.1. Research Design

The survey method was used for this study. In order to find out more about it, quantitative studies were done. With the help of questionnaires, the psychological factors of both high and low academic performers were examined.

4.2. The Population of the Study

A well-defined group of individuals or things that are all known to have some things in common. It is not unusual for all of the people in a group to have something in common (Castillo, 2009). This study's population was made up of students from different public sector universities in District Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

4.3. Sample of the Study

A small number of people that represents the whole group that could be reached is called 'sample'. To find out about a larger group of people, one has to look at a small number of people within the population. Convenience sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling method that lets people who are close to the researcher and easy to reach be chosen as subjects (Castillo, 2009). For this study, 556 bachelor's-level (4-year degree program) students at public universities in District Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, were chosen at random as a sample using the Convenience sampling method.

4.4. Instrumentation

It involves measuring and controlling. The instrumentation strategy requires several considerations before the investigation begins. A questionnaire was created after a literature review. It assessed responses using a 5-Point Likert Scale (Joshi et al., 2015). The survey had close-ended questions. Before finalizing the questionnaire, specialists' opinions were sought.

5. Result and Data Analysis

Table 1 shows the gender of students. This figure presents that there were 48% of male and 52% of female students who participated in the current study. The majority of the respondents were female.

Table 2 presents the percentage of the data about the student's living. The data depicts that the majority of the students (68.7%) reside locally at their own houses, 3.2 % of them live in a hostel, 9.3 % of them live with relatives, 18.8 % have to travel daily for university.

Table 3 results show that there was no significant disparity between the mean score of male (M=236.07, SD=15.328) and female (M=237.09, SD=16.982) respondents. The significant value was greater than .05 which demonstrated that disparity was not significant because the p-value was greater than 0.05 which indicated that both genders have almost the same grade points, t (556) = .741, Sig = .459.

Table 1: Gender-wise Description of the Students

Gender	F	%
Male	268	48
Female	288	52
Total	556	100.0

Table 2: Living-wise Distribution of the Students

Living	F	%
Local Home	382	68.7
Hostel	18	3.2
With Relatives	52	9.3
Daily Travel	104	18.8
Total	556	100.0

Table 3: Gender-wise Comparison of the Grades

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Male	268	236.07	15.328	-.741	.459
Female	288	237.09	16.982		

Table 4 showed the results of the students' academic causes that there was significant disparity between the mean score of male (M= 3.2939, SD= .45611) and female (M= 3.3697, SD= .49013) respondents. The significant value was smaller than .05 which demonstrated that the disparity was significant because the p-value was smaller than 0.05 which indicated that both genders have different views for their academic causes t (556) = -2.243, Sig = .025.

Table 5 show the results of the students' psychological factors that there was a significant disparity between the mean score of male (M=3.1886, SD=.68067) and female (M=3.3852, SD= .65092) respondents. The significant value was less than .05 which demonstrated that the disparity was significant because the p-value was less than 0.05 which indicated that both genders have different views for their psychological causes, t (556) = -4.156, Sig = .000.

Table 6 show the results of the students' physiological causes that there was no significant disparity between the mean score of male (M=3.0414, SD=.58532) and female (M=3.0970, SD= .61160) respondents. The significant value was greater than .05which demonstrated that the disparity was not significant because the p-value was greater than 0.05 which indicated that both genders have almost the same physiological causes, t (556) = -1.301, Sig = .194.

Table 4: Gender-wise Comparisons of the Academic Factors

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Male	268	3.2939	.45611	-2.243	.025**
Female	288	3.3697	.49013		

Table 5: Gender-wise Comparison of the Psychological Causes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Male	268	3.1886	.68067	-4.156	.000**
Female	288	3.3852	.65092		

Table 6 Gender-wise Comparisons of the Physiological Causes

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Male	268	3.0414	.58532	-1.301	.194
Female	288	3.0970	.61160		

6. Discussion

Academic, social, psychological and physical factors all have an impact on students' academic performance at the university level. This study attempted to provide some insights and recommendations for dealing with the situation. Social support and involvement were found to be essential and significant for students' learning outcomes in findings related to social factors. Social support came from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers, and friends. The current study's quantitative findings on social factors revealed a positive and significant relationship between a lack of social support and students' low academic achievement. The qualitative findings backed up the social aspects of students' poor academic performance/grades. Respondents agreed that social support improved students' academic performance. They believed that a lack of social support from parents, teachers, and friends was harming students' academic performance.

The data reveal that a lack of parental involvement in their child studies, whether in terms of course material or financial aid, results in low grades. When parents are unable to provide financial assistance, students must work part-time to cover their educational expenses. As a result, they have less time to devote to their studies. Students sometimes work at night to help and support their parents financially. Furthermore, if the parents force their child to study subjects in which the student has no interest, it will lead to low grades, it leads to low or poor academic performance. Demaray and Malecki (2002) found that the support provided by parents and class fellows is significantly related to high academic grades. Ratelle et al. (2005) agreed and found that parental support predicts higher academic achievement. Malecki and Elliott (1999) revealed that the teacher support is important and related to students' academic performance in their study. The engagement between student and teacher eventually leads to academic achievements, and students having better teacher support were found to achieve high grades. As a result, it is concluded that students respond differently depending on the type of assistance they receive from their parents, friends, teachers, and class fellows.

Houtenville and Conway (2008) argue that there is a strong and positive link between support, involvement, and academic achievement. Students in a better academic environment have higher levels of social support than those in a poor academic environment. Social support influences students' academic performance positively, whereas lack of this support influences their performance negatively. This study's findings are consistent with previous studies (Safree & Adawiah, 2009; Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2011) that have supported the facts and evidence that a high level of social support and involvement is associated with higher levels of academic grades/achievements or vice versa. It means that students will come up with better results if the teachers are interested in their students' studies, they are punctual and complete their teaching tasks on time, and they support students by meeting their needs related to the teaching and learning process. According to Cutrona et al. (1994), this support increases and contributes to the student's beliefs about encouragement and teaching. He further adds and back the idea that social support and teacher involvement result in positive outcomes such as high academic performance or vice versa.

7. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, more than half of the students were unable to continue their studies or find a good job. These certificates are typically the culmination of their academic careers. Therefore, consolidated

efforts to improve academic grades are required. The findings on the social factors of low academic achievement among students concluded that a lack of parental and teacher involvement and support was the most significant factor, while a lack of help from friends was a minor factor. The results of the technological factors concluded that the excessive and harmful use of social media was the most important reason of students' low academic performance. Less exposure to social media means better academic performance.

According to the findings, psychological factors are influenced by examination stress, anxiety, and social stress. On the other hand, students' academic stress and anxiety were among the minor reasons for their low academic performance. The results of physical factors concluded that environmental stress, anxiety, and poor health issues were the most significant reasons for students' low academic marks, while physical stress and anxiety were minor reasons. Furthermore, the distinction was significant for technological, academic, and physical factors. Therefore, students have nearly identical perspectives on technological, academic, and physical factors impacting students' performance.

8. Recommendations and Future Research Suggestions

The study's limitation was that it concentrated on the three dimensions, social, academic, and physical, that contribute to students' academic performance. Future research can look into other aspects of students' academic performance by comparing universities with high and low student performance. A comparative study can also be conducted to investigate the differences in academic performance between public and private sector university students. Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis can be used to generalize the findings and develop a psycho-social ecological model of students' having low academic achievements. The researchers may also consider investigating the performance subject-wise and identify factors that contribute towards good and poor academic performance. A longitudinal study at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels documenting the long-term effects of students' family background and reputation of the institutions can reveal interesting results. Case studies can be used to conduct in-depth investigations of specific factors based on demographic conditions. Furthermore, a cross-sectional study on various levels of education can be conducted and compared.

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