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A Qualitative Exploration of Factors Affecting Academic Achievement of University Students

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to identify the prospected factors affecting undergraduate university students' academic achievement. This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of university students regarding the factors that impact their academic achievement. The study's general population includes all of Punjab's universities and education departments. Purposive sampling was used to select the desired participants for the interview, and 10 participants were chosen. A semi-structured interview was used to gather qualitative data. Participants' interview responses were transcribed for qualitative data analysis, and thematic analysis was performed. Seven main themes (e.g., family, environment) and all sub-themes were categorized into positive (e.g., Supportive family, self-drive) and negative factors (e.g., Performance anxiety, holistic environment at home). The findings have implications for educators, policymakers, and students. The results may serve as a guide for students and education institutions seeking to raise university students' academic achievement.*

Key Words: Academic Achievement, Factors, University Students, Education, Qualitative Research

Introduction

One of the fundamental components of the educational system, the student, has always been seen as the future of society and, as such, has been a part of an ongoing process of development. Countries try to promote knowledge, skills, behaviour, competence, and concepts that are consistent with the global development process by adhering to it. Contemporary studies have endeavoured to develop numerous novel conceptual or theoretical explanations for university students' academic achievements. Academic achievement is the success, development, and knowledge that teachers inculcate in their students in the classroom (Carter & Good, 1973). It is anticipated that students would effectively complete assigned activities, exhibit a perfectionist approach, demonstrate resistance in the face of problems, and develop ways to overcome hurdles in order to facilitate academic performance (Cox, 1990).

Examining the research in the literature, it can be concluded that achieving academic success is one of the education system's essential objectives and that doing so contributes significantly to the advancement of welfare levels and societal development. Many factors contribute to the academic achievement of students, such as their family, environment, economic condition, study habits, health conditions, and time management skills ((Munoz & Portez, 2001). The chief factors that contribute to their academic achievement are the family's educational attainment, which can influence the student's style of thinking, point of view, faith in democracy, and academic performance (Ozcan, 2021). Low or negligible family support and concern are the most significant characteristics that separate kids who have to repeat a class due to low academic achievement from other students (Diaz, 1989). According to Aslanargun, Bozkurt, and Sarioglu (2016), children who have high expectations for their academic performance also look to their

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relatives to provide them with emotional support and to show their interest in both their education and themselves.

The teacher, who stands at the centre of the educational system, is another element that can have a big impact on a student's academic success. It is possible to think of the teacher as an integral component that helps students acquire their behavioural skills cognitive and affective development, prepares them for careers, develops individuals who are well-suited for society, and forms society in the future (Ozcan, 2021). An effective teacher sets up the classroom for instruction, is flexible and easygoing, decisive, embraces and appreciates different perspectives, and gives importance to students' achievements. They also reward their efforts and encourage students to become more interested in the lesson (Dilekman, 2008).

Motivation is one of the most important factors that influence the academic achievement of students. According to a summary of academic performance motivational theories by Gopalan et al. (2017), students' academic performance appears to be more closely associated with incentive theories that link rewards to improved performance and arousal theories, which focus on reaching a task's maximal arousal. Additionally, there is a strong correlation between students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories and their drive to perform. They argued that children outperform those who are more extrinsically driven, like through parental pressure, awards, etc., in the classroom (Hassan & Masood, 2022).

Statistics exhibit that people spend roughly two hours a day on various social media apps, sharing messages and images, tweeting, favouriting, updating status, and remarking on numerous updates of socially shared material. A rising number of people who use social networks spend an increasing amount of time on social network groups (Abbott, 2017). Considering that students are utilizing social media services more frequently than they used to and that social media has grown to be a bigger part of their lives, this could become increasingly important. Iwamoto and Chun (2020) propose that students who are influenced by social media posts would be inclined to begin comparing themselves to others or to develop extraordinarily high standards for themselves or others. This can have a number of affective consequences, for instance, the lack of concentration in studies and poor academic results.

The study performed by the most important variables affecting students' academic achievement are poor grades, parental support, accommodations, gender, grade on prior assessment, grade on internal assessment, and e-learning activity of students (Al Husaini & Ahmad Shukor, 2023). This study focuses on a particular problem relating to the academic standing of undergraduate applicants to public universities. The results of exams and tests can be used to define academic success or accomplishments. Determining and recognizing the factors that influence a student's academic success is crucial because academic performance is a crucial aspect for universities and nations worldwide (Islam & Tasnim, 2021). This paper will determine the factors that contribute to the academic achievement of university students.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is the following:

- To explore prospected factors affecting the academic achievement of university students.
- To uncover the underlying dynamics of factors that either impede or enhance the university students' academic achievements.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

- What are the prospected factors that contribute to the academic achievement of university students?
- What are the underlying dynamics of factors that either impede or enhance the university students' academic achievements?

Subject and Methods

Research Design

The aim of this research is to learn about the variables influencing their pupils' academic performance. The case study style of qualitative research methodology was used in the design of the study. Qualitative studies are study approaches that expose perceptions and occurrences holistically in a natural context

through the use of data-gathering techniques like document analysis (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of university students regarding the factors that impact their academic performance.

Sample Size

Ten students who are enrolled in different programs of education departments of public universities make up the study group for this study. Using the purposive sample, the study group was selected. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012), purposive sampling is a technique for creating a sample from which the researcher thinks about gathering the data required for the study.

Instrument

The researcher used a self-designed semi-structured interview to collect the responses of participants. Through the use of interview questions and follow-up questions, the interview approach seeks to systematically gather participants' thoughts regarding the research's purpose (Rasmussen & Yikmis, 2020). A two-part, semi-structured interview form was the data-gathering tool utilized for the interview. The demographic section of the form asks about the participants' gender, degree of education, and GPA. The second set of questions sought to elicit the participants' opinions of the factors influencing their academic achievement are the following:

1. Would you like to share any situation in which you faced academic failure?
2. Would you like to share your academic success moments?
3. Do you think you are self-motivated when performing tasks?
4. Which factors contribute to your motivation to perform your tasks?
5. What factors contribute to your demotivation in performing tasks?
6. Do you feel confident or fearful in initiating a new task?
7. Which factors contribute to your confidence in initiating a new task?
8. What are the factors that limit you from initiating a new task?
9. What are the factors that contribute to your Academic Achievement?

Data Collection

Mobile phones were used to conduct the interviews. In order to conduct the interviews, the students were contacted and informed about the purpose of the study. Students who consented to participate in the interviews were then scheduled for a convenient time period. The participants were consulted before the interviews, and thorough explanations concerning the interviews were provided. The duration of each interview was 25 to 30 minutes. The five questions from the semi-structured research form were asked of those who took part in the interviews. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to guarantee that their comments were accurately captured. In order to capture any pertinent non-verbal cues or observations that could enhance the analysis process, field notes were also gathered during or right after the interviews.

Data Analysis

The gathered data from the semi-structured interviews was examined utilizing the thematic approach. Thematic analysis enables the systematic discovery of themes and patterns in data. The interview data were first transcribed and familiarized with before the analysis was carried out in stages. The original codes were created by the researchers by locating significant informational units in the transcripts. The primary areas of interest in connection to the factors impacting academic achievement were reflected in the arrangement of these initial codes into major themes and sub-themes. The researchers developed the found themes in an iterative method, looking for connections and patterns between them. The last phase involved identifying and giving names to the major themes and sub-themes that arose from the data and represented the elements that affect the academic performance of university students

Results

This study, which examines possible factors that contributed to university students' academic achievements, is divided into six themes. The following tables present the main themes and sub-themes of the content analysis-based study.



Family

Supportive Family

Participants discussed how having a loving familial environment improved their academic achievement. Participants were encouraged to achieve in their studies by supportive families who provided them with understanding, encouragement, and support in their academic endeavours. The majority of students stated that they inherently acquire confidence and perform tasks effectively when their relatives believe in their abilities. One student made the following statement:

My family and my teachers are the main reasons for my confidence. If you have confidence, you can complete any task. Despite this, everyone constantly critiques you and claims you are doing it incorrectly. In the end, you lose heart and abandon the project. Our family, teachers, environment, and, lastly, our accomplishments, which amplify our confidence naturally, are the main contributors to our confidence (P. 4).

Holistic Environment at Home

Some participants experienced challenges in their family environment, such as unresolved personal issues or lack of support, which negatively affected their academic performance. Unfavourable family dynamics and unsupportive attitudes hindered their ability to focus on their studies and achieve academic success. One participant said:

The turning point in my life was when I overcame a failure and attempted to influence my family members' attitudes for the good. Eventually, they realized that we should spread optimism and keep negativity out of our homes (P. 1).

Environment

Impact of Classroom Environmental

Participants discussed the influence of the classroom environment and teacher behaviour on their academic outcomes. Supportive and encouraging teachers played a crucial role in fostering a positive learning atmosphere, while negative teacher behaviour, such as singling out or demotivating students, contributed to academic difficulties. For instance, one participant stated:

My teacher creates a very warm and supportive environment in the classroom. She consistently supports me in various activities and builds my self-confidence. Therefore, it has helped increase my confidence level (P. 10).

Motivation

External Motivation

Participants attributed their motivation to external factors, such as encouragement from family, teachers, and peers. Positive feedback and recognition of their efforts acted as driving forces to persist in their academic pursuits. Following is what one participant said:

Whenever I performed the task, I always got positive feedback and appreciation. I found a competitive environment and considered the results because they made me feel more confident (P. 9).

Intrinsic-Motivation

Several participants emphasized the importance of self-motivation. They exhibited a strong determination to achieve their goals and work towards success independently, even in the absence of external encouragement. As participants stated:

I inspire myself by connecting failures to my future ambitions. It motivates me to accomplish my goals (P. 6).

Experiential Learning

Learning from Experiences

Participants viewed failures as valuable learning experiences. They recognized that setbacks provided opportunities for growth and improvement. Learning from failures allowed them to develop resilience and perform better in their academic endeavours. As one participant stated:

I always learned from my failures and have a competent environment. I like to participate in competitions, whether I lose or succeed. I take it positively because, in the end, I learn something new (P. 10).

Confidence and Fear

Knowledge, Confidence and Support

Participants expressed confidence when they felt prepared and received adequate support from teachers and family. Having relevant knowledge and encouragement increased their confidence in initiating new tasks and facing academic challenges. As one participant mentioned:

Positive attitude, and I have ample knowledge about the task I am going to perform (P. 7).

Performance Anxiety

On the other hand, fear arose when participants felt unprepared or lacked a supportive environment. Fear of failure and negative outcomes hindered their confidence in taking up new tasks and impacted their academic performance. One participant said:

Yes, I feel fearful because it's difficult for me to manage time for the task. So, whenever I have to initiate a new task, I fear that I cannot perform it well and that the results will not be good (P. 8).

Social Media Addiction

Negative Impact of Excessive Social Media Use

One participant highlighted the negative effect of excessive social media use on academic performance. Spending significant time on social media during exams or study periods distracted them and affected their ability to concentrate on their studies effectively. As a participant stated that:

Excessive use of social media is the main factor. I spend the majority of my time on social media apps. Due to my propensity to use social media during tests, I did the same. And as a result, I started to doubt my ability to perform properly (P. 6).

Puzzled and Absent-minded

Results highlighted that students who use social media excessively are usually puzzled and absent-minded as they cannot focus properly on their studies. They are always scrolling on the phone and using different applications, which affects their ability to concentrate. As one said:

I couldn't concentrate on my studies properly. Whenever I try to study and check different groups for study material, Then it automatically distracts me, and I start searching for different things, and it diverts my attention entirely (P. 3).

Academic success

Diligence and Self-Drive

Participants attributed their academic achievements to their hard work and determination. They showed persistence and dedicated effort towards their academic goals. As stated by one participant:

I think my moment of success was that I didn't lose hope at that crucial time. I did hard work, and I gained above-average marks. This was the determination that helped me to continue my studies (P. 2).

Teachers Support

Participants recognized the importance of support from family and teachers in their academic success. Encouragement and guidance from these sources played a significant role in their achievements. As one participant said:

I would say the most important factor is the teacher. If you don't get along well with your teacher, you cannot perform well in your studies. But if your teachers are good, your performance will be better. So, my belief is that if your family and teachers are not with you, then you can never achieve (P. 4).



Clear Goals and Future Vision

Setting clear academic goals and having a vision for their future motivated participants to excel in their studies. They were driven by a sense of purpose and direction in their academic endeavours. As one participant stated:

I am also driven by my efforts because I have goals for the future that push me to work hard (P. 6).

Table 1

Overall presentation of positive/negative factors contributed to academic achievement

Factors	
Positive Factors/Enhancing factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supportive family ▪ Diligence and Self-Drive ▪ Teacher Support ▪ Clear Goals and Future Vision ▪ Impact of the classroom environment ▪ External motivation ▪ Intrinsic-motivation ▪ Learning from experiences ▪ Knowledge, Confidence and Support
Negative Factors/impeding factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance Anxiety ▪ Holistic environment at home ▪ Negative impact of excessive social media use ▪ Puzzled and absentminded

Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to identify the factors that, in the opinion of the students, influence their academic achievement. Within this framework, ten students from various public colleges provided research data through interviews and the use of mobile phones. The main themes and sub-themes of the study were disclosed to the students in response to five questions and probing questions posed to them during the research process. The research results are contrasted with those of related studies in this portion of the study.

The first main theme is Family, and the sub-theme that emerged was 'supportive family and holistic environment at home'. This factor contributed to students' performance in both ways. Supportive families enhance academic performance, whereas negative attitudes of families discourage students and badly influence their studies. Examining the performed studies, it is found that there is a substantial correlation between academic achievement and parents' educational attainment, with children who have university-educated parents scoring higher on academic success measures (Arslantas, Ozkan, & Kulekci, 2012). According to Lawrence and Dr.C.Barathi (2019), there is a definite correlation between parental support and the academic success of upper secondary school children. Parental enthusiasm and encouragement had a major impact on academic achievement and served as a type of positive reinforcement for young students. The results of Sharma and Thahira (2011), Singh & Devgun (2012), Sekar & Mani (2013), and Singh (2016) are all supported by this finding.

The second major theme revolves around the environmental aspect, with a derived sub-theme focusing on the 'impact of the classroom environment. This sub-theme explains how encouraging students to actively participate in a variety of educational activities is facilitated by a supportive classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, students may experience anxiety if the classroom atmosphere is depressing and filled with negativity. This may prevent them from asking questions and make it difficult for them to complete tasks.

The exploration of the third major theme centres on motivation, with specific attention given to its sub-themes: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. This analysis explores the complex dynamics of motivation, clarifying how students' performance and engagement in an educational setting are shaped by both internal and external factors. Examples of these include personal fulfilment and a passion for

learning, which are examples of intrinsic motivation. Various studies have found that the motivation of students has a significant impact on their academic achievement (Sivrikaya, 2019; Bailey & Phillips, 2016). Internal motivation was identified by Abdulghani et al. (2014) as a critical component of improved academic achievement in their qualitative investigation of undergraduate students' academic performance.

The fourth central theme under scrutiny is experiential learning, with a particular focus on its sub-theme: learning from failures. This theme study explores the complex world of experiential learning, shedding light on how students pick up knowledge and skills via hands-on experiences and practical engagement. "Learning from failures," the sub-theme, emphasizes the importance of obstacles and setbacks in the learning process. It aims to disentangle the complex mechanisms by which students acquire important lessons, perseverance, and flexibility from setbacks, advancing a comprehensive comprehension of the influence of experiential learning on students' learning paths. As the past studies reveal, research by Arthur and Raine (2017) and Matias and Gonzalez (2017), experiential learning can be a great opportunity for pupils, and because it gives them real-world examples, pupils' interest in the educational process will increase.

The fifth overarching main theme centres around the interplay of confidence and fear in academic achievement. This exploration highlights two distinct sub-themes: 'Knowledge Confidence and Support' and 'Performance Anxiety.' The "Knowledge Confidence and Support" sub-theme focuses on how resources and a helpful learning environment influence students' confidence in their comprehension of academic material. This sub-theme explores the vital role that fostering academic success requires a stable sense of understanding. On the other hand, 'Performance Anxiety' explores the psychological aspects of the concern associated with low performance. It entails a careful examination of how students' anxiety related to academic tasks might impair their performance in general and raise obstacles to their ability to be expressed effectively. As the study results are incorporated with the study of Akbari and Sahibzada (2020), students' level of self-confidence significantly influences their ability to learn. This includes their ability to share their opinions, form relationships with teachers and peers, set goals, manage their anxiety, and become more interested in the material in order to learn more efficiently.

Social media addiction is the sixth main subject of the inquiry. Two relevant sub-themes have emerged, which are "Negative Impact of Excessive Social Media Use" and "Puzzled and Absentminded." The "Negative Impact of Excessive Social Media Use" sub-theme looks further into the negative consequences that arise from extended and intensive use of social media platforms. The drive of this investigation is to identify the potential negative effects of excessive usage on both general well-being and academic achievement. Meanwhile, the sub-theme "Puzzled and Absentminded" explores the cognitive components of social media dependency, looking at how excessive use of online platforms can cause a person's mental state to become disorganized or distracted. This sub-theme aims to clarify the potential cognitive difficulties and distracted behaviour that arise from the widespread usage of social media. As the students reported, using social media excessively causes time wasting, study distraction, academic procrastination, and subpar academic achievement (Ozer et al., 2014). Likewise, other studies showed a parallel finding as students who utilized social networks and the internet more than the average did not perform well academically and did not pay attention in class, as per the results of a study conducted on students of medical (Upadhyay & Guragain, 2017), and a different study conducted on students in Qatar revealed that students with social networking addictions had worse Grade Point Averages (GPAs) than other students (Al-Yafi, El-Masri, & Tsai, 2018).

The seventh significant and major factor is academic success as a driving element that contributes to the academic achievement of the students, and the sub-themes that come up from it are 'Diligence and Self-Drive, Teacher Support, and Clear Goals and Future Vision'. The three main sub-themes that stem from this main topic are "Clear Goals and Future Vision," "Teacher Support," and "Diligence and Self-Drive." Examining these elements closely reveals the critical significance that a student's dedication and self-drive play. Furthermore, the direction and assistance offered by educators play a crucial role in promoting learning development. Further, students' academic experiences are shaped, and overall academic achievement is enhanced by the formation of clear goals and an optimistic vision, as the study of Abdulghani et al. (2014) showed that top achievers give priority to their educational demands. They seemed to attend classes more frequently and actively participated in the lessons. The power of goal setting



has been studied for many years. Setting goals keeps students focused on desired outcomes and provides a clear direction for success (Dotson, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, a thorough investigation of numerous factors illuminates the complex web of factors affecting university students' academic achievement. Results have implications for students, teachers and policymakers. Findings may guide both students and institutes in working to improve the academic performance of undergraduate college/university students. Hence, we can say that a supportive family has a great influence on student performance as well as teacher support and motivation. A good teacher has a clear vision and mission that he transfers to his students because, without the vision and mission, teachers and students go on a road about which they don't know where to go. Therefore, the environment of the classroom has a deep impact not only on students' studies but also on their personality and social development. So, external and internal motivation also greatly influence students' studies. Moreover, learning from experience or active learning is very important in study as students participate in different activities, which helps them develop confidence in their self-abilities and learn by doing. As we know, student hard work and determination are the main factors that contribute to student achievement.

So, there are some recommendations.

- There should be a helpful environment in classrooms for all students equally.
- There should be a supportive environment at homes for students
- Proper awareness of social media use
- Treat the students individually according to their needs

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