



Identification of Causes of Student' Low Academic Achievements at Higher Secondary Level: A Qualitative Study

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p>History: Accepted 25 July 2020 Available Online 30 September 2020</p>	<p><i>The present qualitative study was aimed to investigate the causes of Low Academic achievements of higher secondary students. Thirty participants were individually interviewed by a semi-structured schedule interview by purposive sampling techniques. All the interviews were audio-recorded. The data was analyzed by 'thematic analysis' technique, results showed that lack of parental involvement and support, lack of teachers involvement and support, lack of help and support from friends, excessive and negative use of social media, lack of students involvement and interaction in class, lack of interest in English, lack of learning facilities and teaching methodology, academic stress and anxiety, examination stress and anxiety, social stress and anxiety, environmental stress and anxiety, physical stress and anxiety, and poor health issues were the reasons causing low academic achievements among students. This study is helpful for educationists, psychologists, parents, teachers, and students to identify particular causes, creating biasness in students' academic grades. They should make efforts to eradicate the identified causes having negative effects on the academic achievements of students who are our future leaders.</i></p>
<p>Keywords: Social Support, Social Media, Academic, Psychological, Stress, Anxiety, Low Academic Achievement</p>	
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1. Introduction

The current study has empirical, theoretical, and practical suggestions for the decision and action for the investigation of the causes of students' low academic achievement and to cope with the situation. From a theoretical viewpoint, this refers to contribute to the higher secondary students' literature. As it highlights the causes of the students' low academic grades at the higher secondary level and provides suggestions to cope with this situation. Thus the present study is one of the efforts to identify the causes of low academic achievements and provide suggestions to improve the situation at the Higher Secondary level. The findings of the study will be helpful for the School Education department, parents, teachers, and students to follow the suggestion to cope with this situation. The objectives of this study are to investigate the social causes of low academic achievements of students, to determine the psychological causes of low academic

achievements of students and to find out the suggestions for the improvement of students academic achievements.

Students' low academic achievement is one of the most challenging dilemmas faced by students, teachers, and parents. Students are indispensable assets for educational institutes (Llie & Ciocoiu, 2010). Achievements have a pivotal role in their academic life. Academic achievements determine the students' progress, attainment, and level of success. Various factors play an integral part in the students' learning process. Students have to go through the process of learning and then evaluation; evaluation is the yardstick indicator for student's academic performance and achievement. Students are awarded certificates with different Grades from "A to F" based on their marks percentages and framed standards.

Low or poor achievements in the students' academics is 'adjudged by the examinee and some other important aspects as falling below an expected standard' for grant of the level of their academic achievement by grading (Aremu, 2000). The last six results of the "Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Bahawalpur" are evidence that more than half (above 50%) of the students pass their exam with grade "D" and below. The students pass with grade D, and below are Low academic achievers. Therefore, the number of students having low grades was larger than the number of passed students in the external examinations of higher secondary students in the district Bahawalpur. The tendency to make an association between the intelligence level and the achievement of the students' academics may whilst true but it is too simplistic, at hand many are the contributing causes that influence the students' achievements. They face difficulty in getting admission either in higher education or securing employment. Students' life at the higher secondary level is a time of tremendous transition phase for most of the students. Students have to make multiple decisions; they may be under pressure and are affected by the environment which encompasses multiple causes. The causes influence and vary from one student/nation to another nation including the variables inside and outside the educational institutes affecting students' academic achievements (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). Therefore, the need was emerged to examine the underline factors.

Several studies found academic achievements in the literature with different aspects. Adane (2013) identifies and traces out the social factors affecting the academic achievements of Junior High School students. The researcher felt the need to contribute and fill the gap in knowledge by adding psychological aspects related to stress and anxiety along with social aspects causing students low academic grades. *"The support received as love, care, involvement, and help from the individuals in the life span of an individual is regarded as Social support"* (Gurung, 2006). *"Social media sites employ, mobile and technology based on web to create vastly interactive platforms by the use of which individuals and community share, co-create, discuss and modifies contents generated by users"* (Kietzmannn, 2012). An academic factor of learning is related to education, including Student-teacher interaction, teaching pedagogy, and students' interest. *"The psychological factors of learning are those which are necessarily concerned with the mind and behavior of the learner towards learning. It is sometimes associated with the physical makeup, environmental setting, individual differences, and life-approach of the learner i-e sense of perception, fatigue, environmental conditions"* (Ahmed, 2016). Stress is described as emotions that are negative and have a significant influence on the learning process, cognition, and physical health of an individual. (Schwabe, 2010). Anxiety is associated with displeasing feelings related to fear that characterized the behavioral, cognitive, somatic, and emotional components of an organism (Davison, 2008; Seligman, 1996).

Few studies, Adane (2013); Almuammria (2015); Omari (2002), and Wilson (2011) have investigated the reasons for the low/poor academic achievement of elementary and secondary school students. These conducted studies were in places with diversity in social settings and geographic. Work-related to academic achievements found in the literature however, the literature reviewed does not address the questions raised by this research in the study. Moreover, there is hardly any study found related to the causes of low academic achievements at the level of higher secondary students. Moreover, to date, no study from Pakistan has qualitatively explored the causes of students' low academic achievements. The qualitative design of this study not only provides depth and detail in obtained data by recording, encourages, and expands the ideas initially based on responses. Therefore, the main aim of the study was to investigate the causes based on the social and psychological causes of students' low academic achievements at the higher secondary level.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design and Settings

This qualitative study design was conducted in the public higher secondary institutions in the district Bahawalpur affiliated to the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Bahawalpur. According to the Education Department (2018), there were public (27) Higher Secondary Schools and (25) Colleges in district Bahawalpur. The study was qualitative; therefore, by using a semi-structured interview schema, an in-depth face to face interview was conducted with thirty teachers of schools/colleges.

2.2 Study Instrument

A semi-structured interview comprised five questions. Before the conduct of interviews, piloting of the first draft undertaken to test and ensure uniformity of questions. It was conducted with two teachers from Higher Secondary School and two from college. The purpose was to make sure that questions were understood by the participants as posed to be.

2.3 Recruitment and Data Collection

A purposive sampling technique was utilized to enlist the participants of the study. They were approached to get consent for interviews. Based on their consent, the researcher then contacted them for the administration of the research instrument. For interviews, the researcher personally visited and took the teachers' interviews by semi-structured interview protocol to get detailed information for further exploration from them. The researcher intended to analyze the facts and features wherever comprehensive data regarding this matter was requisite from each teacher on the basis of their teaching experiences. Before the conduct of the interview study participants were assured about the information provided by them will be kept confidential and the provided information by them would be kept confidential and is used only for research purposes. Further, keeping an ethics permit was taken for the recording. The participants did not allow video recording. But participants did not have objection for their audio recording. An audio recorder was used for recording. The recorded interviews were saved with the name of the institute.

3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. MS Word was used to transcribe interview files. After reading the transcripts several times, codes were coded to the text accordingly. The themes were developed and analyzed step by step. Codes were amalgamated /merged into sub-categories and categories with the purpose to explore the themes. Major themes

with several subscale themes were consequently obtained; analysis was carried out on the origin of data. The reliability of the data was checked for valid and reliable results by studied repeatedly to confirm that it reflects the objectives of the study. To confirm data credibility crosschecking of themes was undertaken. The following themes were drawn from the data.

3.1 Social Causes

The following themes were categorized under social causes.

3.1.1 Lack of parental involvement & support being uneducated parents

The majority (25) of the study participants supported the idea that parents have the least concern. They are busy earning, they did not support and involve in their child's educational activities after their admission, and parents are not in contact with institutions for their children's progress in studies.

“Parents are mostly illiterate, and they do not give attention to their children by involving and supporting them in their study matters, contrary they ask them for help to complete all the household chores instead of studying first”.

“They have no clear aim in life, the parents force and pressure their children to choose the subject of parent’s interest and that’s why they have a lack of interest in the subjects as it does not match with their interest that results in non-seriousness, lack of self-motivation to tackle tasks that are more difficult on their own and absent-mindedness in the class, results in nothing but low grades”.

“Society pressures students to take the wrong subject which results in low grades”.

The participants suggested the need for counseling for the subject choice, *“nothing but counseling for subject choice is very important”*. Further many added, no doubt, at the time of admission the wish from child beyond his/her mental capabilities. Some students have to earn and learn to fulfill their expenses.

“Sometimes student takes tuition and a part-time job to fulfill their educational requirements”.

3.1.2 Lack of teachers involvement & support

The majority (26) study participants viewed about over-crowded classroom’s learning environment creates trouble in interaction with students. Further, there is a lack of teaching aids to engage huge classes properly.

“Teachers are supportive, they try to interact but a large number of student strengths in the class becomes a hurdle to interact with every student”.

Social issues are with a child if he/she is not comfortable with peers.

“Learning how to interact properly with fellows does not always come naturally to a student, and often they need the involvement and support of a good teacher to learn how to overcome their shyness and engage themselves properly”.

3.1.3 Lack of help and support from friends/peers

Many (19) study participants opined that peer group support is lacking as peers treat negatively and use degrading comments. Hence, the environment of the classroom has a pivotal role.

“Peer influence having negative attitudes never let the students focus on any positive work like study. In-class test some friends help in cheating but in exams they don’t, the result becomes diverse”.

3.1.4 Excessive & negative use of social media

Almost all (27) the participants viewed students' misuse of electronic gadgets namely smart mobiles, laptops/computers have a negative impact on students' academic grades.

“Students develop habits of using social sites which are destructive for their study career because they spent most of their time on the electronic devices by indulging in different social sites”.

Parents provide smart gadgets as a facility to get the most current knowledge but, the young generation cheats their parents by their misuse.

“Parents provide electronic tools as a gift at a very young age like laptops, smart mobile phones, but there is a lack of check and balance by them, I feel bad to acknowledge that we are decaying our future leaders. We are giving a dark future by facilitating such devices at an innocent age”.

The situation is very pathetic; in the classrooms students used internet sites. Overcrowded classes made it easy for students to cheat teachers by using mobile during lectures.

“80% of students excessively use negative internet and social media sites that divert them from studies, I even observe the teacher who is a guide also indulge in its usage”.

“Mobile should be strictly banned for students”.

The majority (25) participants express negative use of social media sites is practiced, *“Free packages are available overnight”*. They suggested to stop such packages to pin down our future generation *“Please, it is a humble request, save our future stop, stop we don’t want to move in a blind alley”*. Many (24) participants support for awareness program to use technology positively.

They should be guided not to waste time by miss using technology/the internet, *“Provide technology to students on need base with awareness only”*.

3.1.5 Lack of Student Involvement and Interaction In Class

The majority (25) study participants opined that there is a lack of students' involvement and interaction in the class, *“There is a lack of student-teacher interaction, and students are least concerned whereas the teacher is not flexible in terms of class size and time management”*.

Participants said teachers support by using available recourses but large classes create hurdles in the interaction between *student-teacher*. So, *this situation is pathetic*. Besides, class sizes are not standardized.

“A huge number of students’ results in the least student-teacher interaction among all students in the class, class size is pathetic”.

So, the main reason is a *“un standardized class size results in poor interaction in the classrooms”.*

3.1.6 Lack of Interest in English

Many (23) participants agreed with and viewed, the English language is a great problem. There is a need for proper planning to teach English as a compulsory subject. Study participants suggested deliver a lecture in understandable dialect, to clear concepts and reduce English phobia. Moreover,

“There should be an interaction between the students and teacher so that they remain active and participate in the teaching-learning process and English phobia can be overcome”.

Teachers must have a helpful and encouraging attitude towards students.

“Students are least motivated about studying subjects in English”.

3.1.7 Lack of Teaching Learning Facilities and Teaching Methodology

The participants believed that the teaching profession should be by choice. Moreover, lack of facilities, improper teaching methodology results in poor understanding and results in students' low academic grades.

“Teaching should be by choice not by chance”.

There is a lack of devotion and passion in the teaching-learning process in some cases. There is a need to revise subjects' combinations and reduction of subjects. The English language is a difficult subject for content understanding so, *“the system needs revisions for it for the improvement in teaching and learning process”.*

Participants viewed that in some cases teaching methodologies are not up to date as,

“Sometimes the teachers teaching methodologies do not match with the learning styles”.

Many (18) participants suggested that *“creativity”* is needed of time for good academics as there is a lack of it, and rote learning is encouraged as good marks awarded to good comprehension. They requested the policymaker that,

“Curriculum should be based on conceptual learning instead of rote memorization”.

3.2 Psychological Causes

Following themes were categorized under psychological causes.

3.2.1 Academic Stress and Anxiety

The study participants highlighted that psychological reasons affect students' performance during an examination. They point out that,

“Lack of self-desire to study because of overburden, disliking and fatigue leads to low academic achievements” results in students’ low academic grades.

Moreover, stress and anxiety have a negative effect on students’ health. Many (15) respondents suggested that first-year students come with a fear of English. It is our dilemma that students’ snubbing is there instead of their encouragement, as teachers are bossy.

3.2.2 Examination Stress and Anxiety

The majority (25) participants explained that student worries for examination and parents' expectations and long distances create nervousness.

“Exam phobia disturbs those students who get nervous and who don’t study properly...and apart from those whose parents have more expectations from their children’s good grades and they pressurize their kind all the time”.

“Long distances and reached tired in the examination center and sometimes late too”.

As a result, *“students get nervous”.*

3.2.3 Social Stress and Anxiety

Participants (25) opined that parents’ high expectation creates elements of stress and anxiety in a social context.

“High expectation of parents is surely contrary to students’ abilities”.

Students belong to diverse backgrounds felt uncomfortable in the class, *“Some don’t feel comfortable interact in class”.*

3.2.4 Environmental Stress and Anxiety

Almost all (26) study participants that the learning environment is not conducive as classes are overcrowded there is no proper ventilation.

“Even teachers are not comfortable teaching, we feel pathetic for students who come daily from long distances, but the voice can’t reach them. Beyond capacity, we have to make the placement of more than a hundred”.

“Overcrowded classrooms without proper ventilation and other facilities, unhealthy environmental conditions for both teacher-students, lights are not available. Moreover, students avoid sitting in uncomfortable situations for long in the examination center.”

3.2.5 Physical Stress and Anxiety

Many (23) participants viewed the physiological issues created for both students-teachers while the teaching-learning process as classes are huge in number. Moreover,

“Classroom and institutions’ environment plays a positive role in teaching and learning process, airy classroom, proper heating, lighting, and cooling arrangements are not available according to the weather”.

The students face physical problems such as, *“Hearing and vision problem of sitting too far, classes are overcrowded”*.

3.2.6 Poor Health Issues

The majority (25) participants viewed health issues creates a hindrance to students.

“There are some students who face health problems and cannot come regularly to college”.
Further,

“Health issues lead students not to come and attend their lectures regularly so that they would be unfamiliar with the contents of exams and score low grades”.

4. Discussion

The study was an effort with a prime aim to find out the social and psychological causes of students' low academic achievements and to give suggestions to cope with the situation. The results supported that the lack of social support from parents, teachers, and friends has negative effects on academic grades. These results are aligned with previous studies Ratelle, Larose, Guay, and Acenecal (2005) who reported that parental support is the predictor of better academic achievements. Students perform academically better positive support influences positively, whereas lack of support affects negatively. The findings of the study are consistent with previous study Yasin & Dzulkifli (2011) who have supported the facts and evidence about the high level of social support and involvement specify the higher level of academic grades/achievements or vice versa. It means that the students who have a better academic environment have high levels of social support. It means social support and involvement leads to positive output with high levels of academic achievements or vice versa.

The results supported the due to the excessive and negative use of social media sites students spent most of their time to engage in useless online activities, and they spent less time on their studies. The current study finds that students' negative and excessive exposure to social media networks has a significant negative influence on the academic achievements of students. These results aligned with findings of previous researches (Olubiyi's ,2012 ; Nicole Ellison, 2007) who found that nowadays students are much engrossed in using social media sites. Thus most of the students' academics are hindered because of diversion towards social media (Peter, 2015).

The results supported that gap between student-teacher interactions, huge class size, difficulty in English, a lack of teaching-learning facilities and teaching methodology, there was a lack of creativity were the reason for students' low academic grades at higher secondary levels. These results are aligned with previous studies found that there is a negative but significant effect on students' interactions, communication, and involvement with anxiety situations. The results of this study are consistent with past studies (Elliot & Joyce, 2005) who reported that the majority of the students are having anxiety while speaking in public. English language and medium of instruction affect the students' learning outcomes. During the transition change in academic life, first-year students have to face this challenging situation. The findings of the current study are consistent with other studies (Andrade, 2006; Husain, 2005; Jacob et al., 2012; Versaevel, 2014) they reported the students' English is not good. It creates trouble in their learning; as a result, they are unable to express their views and ideas in English. Further, inadequate teaching and learning resources affect students' academic performance. The results are consistent with previous studies (Agolla, 2009; Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000) who reported that stress is

created if the students face a lack of physical resources for an ideal learning environment. The results of Murugesan's (2005) study are inconsistent with the results of this study. He reported that practice and preparations reduce anxiety at the adequate levels for communication and interaction is beneficial in decreasing elements of fear among students.

The psychological reasons findings of the study indicated that academic stress and anxiety created hurdles in the learning being overburdened and high expectations, environmental stress and anxiety, and poor health issues as a stressor among students. These findings are aligned and consistent with past studies (Agolla, 2009; Ongori & Agolla, 2008; Stevenson & Harper, 2006) who reported that academic overload creates stress that leads to stress and anxiety among students. This study finds the aligned outcomes about the examination or test stress and anxiety with previous research (Sweetnam, 2002) as they found exam/test anxiety is negatively correlated with academic achievement of students. The present study supported the same results. The studies of Andrews and Wilding, (2004) and Cheraghian et al. (2008) contradicted with the results as they reported test anxiety and academic achievements have no significant association or relationship. Students supported the notion that social stress and anxiety, like high expectations and difficulty to face classmates, were causative of their low academic achievements. The results are aligned with Sanders et al. (2002) as they found stress and students' academic achievements have no relationship. The same findings contradicted the previous studies (Sandler; 2001; Gabre & Kumar, 2012; Talib & Zia-ur-rehman, 2012) who found that there was an association between academic achievements and stress but negative. The results suggested that high levels of stress and anxiety result in lower academic grades or vice versa. The results related to physical stress and anxiety contradict the previous researches (Agolia, 2009; Topper, 2007) who reported that the majority of students experience stress in routine activities of life especially when they reported about the headache.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes among social causes the lack of support, involvement and help from parent, teachers and friends, excessive and negative use of social media sites, lack of involvement in studies and interaction in the classroom, lack of interest in English, non-availability of teaching and learning facilities, and methodology of teaching results students' low academic grades. Examination, social and academic stress and anxiety, environmental and physical stress and anxiety, and poor health issues were among psychological causes for students' low academic marks. This study concludes among social causes the lack of support, The data suggested following measures by authorities to coped with the situation, the need of career counseling centers in educational institutions, need to standardized teacher-student ratio and class size 1-40 in a government institution, ban on overnight cheap internet packages, increase in the duration of the academic session along with the academic calendar, concepts are taught in national dialect, as the English Language as a learning barrier, re-visit curriculum, it should be based on practical skills instead of rote learning, and the skill-oriented subject must be included, revise the evaluation system in both the examination system and the process of evaluation, to hence time management skills. Following are the recommendation based on the results of the current study.

- Counseling experts should guide students for the choice of subjects according to the students' abilities and interests.
- For a better career of such students, skill-oriented subjects must be introduced to secure the certainty of students' future who are our future leaders.

- The teenage students spend most of their time with their parents, teachers, and peers, so the importance of parents cannot be overlooked.
- Parents should psychologically support the children by helping them with the problems they faced.
- Policymakers should work on to making possible efforts to provide an ideal teaching and learning environment.
- Government and policymakers may review the curriculum along with the medium of instructional material at a higher secondary level.

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