

Factors Affecting Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance in Examination

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Abstract

Academic Performance of the students is the outcome of education and it is an area of concern for all academic programs in all levels of education institutions all over the world. Universities and higher education institutions are more subjected to this in striving to be centers of excellence in knowledge and skills generation among students. In view of this, conditions and factors affecting undergraduate students' academic performance become essential.

Literature has documented several factors that affect academic performance of university students that are inside and outside the University. The factors may be termed as demographic and learning environment.

Both primary and secondary data were used from 72 students from final year Bachelor of Business Administration programme of the Faculty of Commerce and Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. . The author has collected data from 72 university students studying in the final year Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) degree programme in the Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The association between learning environment and academic performance was checked by using descriptive analysis. The study found out that there is a positive and significant relationship between learning environment and academic performance of university students. For

the purpose of data analysis, Statistical package of SPSS 22.0 has been used.

. Keywords: demographic factors; learning environment; academic performance.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent years, knowledge has become more and more acknowledged as an important factor for economic development (World Bank, 2008). In this respect, tertiary education has an important contribution to economic growth as it is likely to produce skilled and qualified labour force for global market in relation to the technological development.

Academic programs in institutions of higher education (or tertiary education level) vary in focus, size, and even in the demands that they place on students.

Graduation rates are fundamental to administrators as well, as it is important for academic programs to produce competent students who are well prepared to work as professionals in

their chosen fields. However there are many challenges to meeting these goals. Many academic programs have extremely high attrition rates, and the reasons for such attrition rates vary. Because of these challenges, many studies have been conducted examining the determinants of students' academic achievement and students' intention to successfully complete their studies (Weiss and Amorose 2008).

Different scholars have attempted to identify the variables that predict academic success. Kuh et al (2007) did so when they stated that student success should include five variables. The first variable is student background characteristics, such as demographic and other pre-university experiences. The second variable is the structural characteristics of the institution, such as its size, mission and admission criteria. The third variable pertains to student-faculty interactions, interactions with university staff, and interactions with peers. The fourth variable is the student's perception of the learning environment. The final variable is the quality of effort, or achievement behaviors, of students in educationally purposeful situations.

More specifically, this study aims at identifying the factors contributing to undergraduates' students' performance in examination focusing on

the demographic and student's perception of the learning environment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Universities and other higher learning institutions, strive to be centers of excellence in knowledge and skills generation among students. In view of this, conditions leading to better students' academic performance become crucial. Students' performance at the examination is not steady and on average, but not at the higher level. The literature reveals that students; performance at the examination are affected by many factors.

Despite the growing body of literature focusing on factors contributing to academic success, unfortunately, most studies were conducted in western context. It is still not clear whether similar antecedents of academic success can be observed in Asian context. However the direct relationship between those factors and academic performance is not known.

Further, in Sri Lanka few research studies have been conducted to examine the factors contributing to Academic performances of students. Hence, the clear knowledge gap is explicit. This knowledge gap becomes a problem to planners, policy maker and the administrators.

Therefore, this research study examines the problem and attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the level of the learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka?
2. What is the relationship between the learning environment and the students' performance in the examination at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka?
3. What is the impact of the learning environment on the students' performance in the examination at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objectives

The general objective of the study is to establish the determinants of undergraduate students' academic performance in examination at Eastern University, Sri Lanka. Such information is

expected to assist academics and administrators to design relevant policies and procedures.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

With respect to undergraduate students the study specifically seeks to:

1. Identify the level of the learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka
2. Identify the relationship between the learning environment and the students' performance in the examination at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.
3. To estimate the impact of the learning environment on the students' performance in the examination at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will help academics and administrators in tertiary level education as well educationists in making relevant recommendation to the policy makers especially those dealing with quality assurance and the central admissions. The findings will reveal what relevant policies and strategies need to be employed to improve

academic performance at higher learning institutions. The findings will help the University Academic and administrative office to review its contents of the programmes and methods of delivery in order to improve academic performance.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study was conducted at the Eastern University, Sri Lanka, using final year students from Bachelor of Business Administration programme of the Faculty of Commerce and Management. Variables attributing to students' academic performance in examination at Eastern University, Sri Lanka focus on learning environment, which affect academic performance of undergraduate students.

2. Literature Review

Good academic performance of the students does not happen by chance. It is a product of effective teaching and learning coupled with the effort of the teacher, the education institution, the students, parents and their various home environments. Measuring of academic performance of students is challenging since student performance is product of socio-economic, psychological and environmental factors.

A recent study in Turkey (Bahar, 2010) showed that support from family influenced the level of performance. Lowe and Gayle (2007) also observed that family support may help students to manage and balance their external obligations and academic activities.

Many researchers have discussed the different factor that affects the student academic performance in their research. According to Mushtaq and Khan (2012) there are two types of factors that affect the students' academic performance. These are internal and external classroom factors. Internal classroom factors include, class schedules, class size, learning facilities, complexity of the course material, teachers' role in the class, technology used in the class and exams systems. External classroom factors include extracurricular activities, family problems, financial, social and other problems.

According to Harb and El-Shaarawi (2006) that, student's competence in communication is an important factor and has positive effect on student's performance. They found that, if the students have strong communication skills and have strong grip on language of instruction (English), academic performance increased. The performance of the student is affected by communication skills; it is possible to see

communication as a variable which may be positively related to performance of the student in open learning.

Karemera (2003) identified that, students' performance is significantly correlated with satisfaction with academic environment and the facilities of library and computer lab in the institution. The author also found a positive effect of high academic performance and achievement. Proper use of the facilities provided by the institution to the student, positively affects the student's performance (Norhidayah et. al., 2009). In addition, Young (1999), noted that student performances were linked with use of library. The author concluded that use of the library positively affected the student performance.

Schiefelbein and Simmon, (1981) identified socio-economic status (SES) as a significant predictor of academic outcomes. It is usually a composite measure of parents' occupation, incomes and education. Upper income children may tend to learn the language skills and other behaviors rewarded by institution. They also have access to books, literate parents, toys and other conditions at home. Parent training of the poor could offset some of these advantages. Their finding also reveals that the optimal number of students per class is an important policy issue

because of its cost implications. In 9 of 14 studies relating the effects of class size to student achievement, larger class size was associated with lower student's performance.

Farooq et al, (2011) concluded that the higher level of SES is the best indicator contributing towards the quality of students' achievement. Family characteristics like socio economic status are significant predictors for students' performance at the university besides the other institutional factors, peer factors and student factors.

Higher SES levels lead to higher performance of students in studies, and vice versa (Hanes, 2008). Parental education also has effects on students' academic performance. Parental occupation has little effect on their child's performance in studies than their education. Student's gender strongly affects their academic performance, with girls performing better in the subjects of Mathematics, and English as well as cumulatively. Girls usually show more efforts leading towards better grades (Ceballo, McLoyd & Toyokawa, 2004). It is very important to have comprehensible understanding of the factors that benefit and hinder the academic progress of an individual's education. However, Karemera (2003) found no statistical evidence of

significant association between family income level and academic performance of the student.

Kasirye (2009) found that the most important determinants are: the number of teachers with the mandatory two years of teacher training; a child having an own place to sit. On the other hand, parental education matters partially—the impact of higher education attainment for fathers on learning is only significant for male learning achievement.

However, most of the other teacher characteristics as well as those relating to the head teacher do not appear to significantly influence learning. Consequently, with the considerable success in providing “hard” school infrastructure, Hijaz and Naqvi (2006) observed that there is a negative relationship between the family income and students’ performance in private colleges in Pakistan.

Most recent study by Mushtaq and Khan (2012) in Islamabad, Pakistan, measured the determinants of academic performance. The study found that communication, learning facilities, proper guidance and family stress are the factors that affect the student performance. Communication, learning facilities and proper guidance showed a significant positive impact on the student performance while family stress had negative impact on the student performance. Family stress was found to reduce the performance of the student.

3. Conceptualization

Following conceptual framework was developed based on literature survey. This conceptual framework highlights the learning environment and students’ performance at the examination.

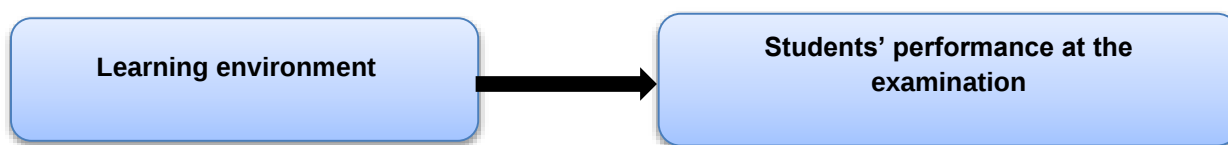


Fig. 1. Figure Conceptual Model

4. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to empirically investigate the assumption that students’

performance at the examination increases when they have facilitating learning environment.

Researcher applied quantitative methodology for this study. Thus, survey method has been adopted. Learning environment has been identified as a factor influencing students' performance at the examinations for the purpose of questioner development. Furthermore, the questionnaire was used to collect the data from the study area.

4.1 Sample Selection

Eastern University, Sri Lanka is one of the 15 state universities in Sri Lanka located in the district of Batticaloa. It has five faculties. Faculty of commerce and Management (FCM) is among them. The FCM has 6 special degree programmes which is a 4 years programme. Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) is one of them. This study is limited to the BBA programme. The total numbers of students of the programme amounting to 395, the number of students from the final year who regularly attend to lectures of the BBA programme is 72, thus the total 72 students were considered as the respondents based on census sampling method, and the questionnaires were distributed accordingly.

4.2 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study was carried out based on primary and secondary data. Structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. Hence questioner was given to the 72 students in the final year BBA programme of the Faculty of commerce and Management.

Likert scale of 1-5 which ranges from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" was applied in the questionnaire to identify responses. The numerical values were given for the purpose of quantification of variable as follows:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree.
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

4.3 Data Presentation, Analysis and Evaluation

Data has been presented using tables. Meanwhile descriptive analysis was used for data analysis. Hence under the descriptive analysis, mean and standard deviation were derived from the analysis of 72 respondents.

Table 1. Decision rule for univariate analysis

Range	Decision attributes
$1 \leq X_i \leq 2.5$	Low level
$2.5 < X_i \leq 3.5$	Moderate level
$3.5 < X_i \leq 5.0$	High level

Source- Formed for this research

5. Analysis and Findings

5.1 Sample Profile

The Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka have been selected

Table 2. Sample and Response rate

Gender	Number of Students	Proportion	Response rate (100%)
Male	30	42	100
Female	42	58	100
	72	100%	

Source-Data analysis

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Univariate analysis was carried out for evaluating the attributes of variables as individually based on the responses. Here, the frequency, mean values and standard deviation of variables were considered for analysis. Mean values have been distributed based on Likert's scale which represent "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" of between 1 to 5. Meanwhile mean values were

for this study. It consists of 395 students, from those 72 students of the final year study Programme as per the Table 2.

evaluated based on the established evaluative criteria which range from "Low level" to "High level".

5.3 Findings and Discussion of learning environment and students' performance at the examinations in the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

This section provides findings and discussion on learning environment and students' performance at the examinations in the Faculty of commerce and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka in order to meet the first objective of this study. It is the examination of the learning environment.

The data presented in Table 4, revealed that the mean value and the standard deviation for learning environment were 3.66 and 0.69

respectively. The mean value indicated higher level which is more than the range of moderate level ($2.5 < 3.5$) as mentioned in the table 1. Thereby the level of learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management, of the Eastern University Sri Lanka is at the higher level. Further considering the standard deviation it could be stated that most of the respondents were of the same opinion regarding the level of learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management, of the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

Table 3. Learning Environment of the respondents with related mean and Sd.

Independent Variable	Mean	Std. deviation
Learning Environment	3.66	0.69

Source-Data analysis

5.4 Academic performance of the Respondents

Among the sample of the respondents analyzed, 28% of the respondents were in favour of higher level of Academic performance, and 64% were in favour of moderate level of Academic performance, while only 8% of the respondents

indicated lower level. The average mean value and standard deviation (sd) for Academic performance were 3.25 and 0.55 respectively (Table 4). The mean value indicated within the range of moderate scale of $2.5 < x_i < 3.5$. Thereby, the level of Academic performance became moderate.

Table 4. Academic performances with related mean and Sd.

Dimensions	Mean	Sd
Academic performance	3.25	0.55

(Source: Survey data)

5.5 Relationship between learning environments and Academic performance

By observing the data a significant positive relationship exists between the independent

variables and dependent variable, that is; learning environments and Academic performance. Table 5 shows a correlation matrix, which describes such relationship between the variables.

Table 5. Coefficient of Correlation between learning environments and Academic performances of students.

Variables	Learning environments	Academic performance
Learning environments		
Pearson Correlation		0.640
Sig.(2-tailed)	1	0.000
No	72	72

(Source: survey data)

(Pr = Significance level, the model is significant at 5%)

The Table 5 shows that Academic performances have a positive significant relationship with learning environments (SA) ($r = 0.640$, $Pr < 0.000$). In addition, the correlation analysis describes how the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables exists at 5% significance level. The correlation between learning environments and Academic performances shows a high positive significant relationship

6. Conclusion and Recommendation.

This study on the factors influencing the performance at the examinations of the students of the BBA programme of the faculty of Commerce

and Management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka reveal that, the learning environment are at high level.

The correlation analysis describes there is a strong positive relationship between dependent variable and independent variable. The correlation between learning environments and Academic performances shows a high positive significant relationship

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