

FACTORS AFFECTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATES: CASE STUDY IN A STATE UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this research is to identify the factors affecting the academic performance of undergraduates at a state university in Sri Lanka. Specifically, the study identifies the effect of the students' lecture attendance, English knowledge, time spent studying, family background, and self-motivation on academic performance. The author used a questionnaire survey as the data collection method and used a quantitative research approach. The sample related to this study is 348 undergraduates representing all six faculties from level 2 to level 4. Level 1 students were not considered since they had not received their semester results at the time of data collection. The analysis is conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, normality, linearity, and multi-collinearity were conducted as preliminary statistical analyses. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaires. Moreover, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted by the author to address research questions/hypotheses. It was found that self-motivation, lecture attendance, time spent studying, and English knowledge of the students positively and significantly affect academic performance. Among these factors, self-motivation was the most influential factor in academic performance. It was found that students' family background does not affect academic performance. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors influencing the academic performance of undergraduates at a state university in Sri Lanka, and the findings will be used to provide a guide for undergraduates to improve their academic performance. Furthermore, these findings will assist lecturers and administration in observing and taking necessary steps to improve academic performance at this Sri Lankan state university.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, A State University of Sri Lanka, Undergraduates, University Education,*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a critical issue to address because it is the primary means of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, and capabilities. Proper education directly impacts a country's development; thus, maintaining an effective education system in a country is mandatory, and university education takes center stage when discussing country development and education. Because university students are the primary source of human capital, academic performance among university students is a hotly debated topic.

Governments spend more money on education, especially in Sri Lanka, where we have a free education system that is fully funded by the government. As a result, educators and other education authorities must ensure that value for money is prioritized and that government investment is at least equal to students' academic achievements. The disparity between these two aspects will indicate a flaw in educational standards. And it will have a negative impact on the country's development. As a result, paying close attention to undergraduate performance is essential. It is critical to identify factors influencing academic performance in order to reduce students' negative/low academic performance. Based on the findings, actions can be taken to improve academic performance while reducing poor academic performance. As a result, this study is being conducted to identify factors influencing undergraduate academic performance.

Academic success (academic achievement) of students is critical in producing the highest quality graduates who will serve as outstanding leaders and workforce for the country and thus be accountable for the country's economic and social development (Ali et al., 2009). To improve the quality of the university's output, special attention must be paid to the performance of its students. Because, as soon as they graduate, they become the primary source of labour in the economy. The academic performance of university students is a major determinant of their career and future success. As a result, studying factors influencing university students' academic performance is prevalent.

Thanks to the gift of free education, Sri Lanka has 17 government universities, and admission to government universities is highly competitive, limited, and standardized. As a result, undergraduates have been dubbed "the cream of the nation." Each year, less than 16% of students are admitted to the 15 state universities based on G.C.E Advance Level (A/L) examination z- score and population relating to each district university cut-off. As a result, in order to enrol in a government university, students must obtain a high A/L grade.

However, once enrolled in university, students' academic performance varies greatly. In the worst-case scenario, the majority of students do not realize the true value of higher education. Some students receive lower grades, have higher dropout rates, must repeat and drop out of university, or graduate with a general pass. Lower grades had a negative impact on students' overall performance, career, and labour demand in the future. As a result, identifying and addressing factors influencing academic performance is beneficial to students, academic staff, policymakers, parents, and society. Factors influencing the academic performance of university undergraduates will be observed and evaluated in this study. This study will make use of students from a Sri Lankan state university. As a result, the researcher determined that it is critical to study undergraduate academic performance because only a few studies have looked into this aspect and even fewer in Sri Lanka.

The author conducted the research after thoroughly reviewing existing research in the field, and it has come to the author's attention that the factors influencing undergraduate academic performance in this Sri Lankan state university. Many researchers around the world have addressed the issue of undergraduate performance.

The majority of studies have been conducted using the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) as a measure of academic performance and provide recommendations for improving academic performance. The author of the current study is attempting to address some other items to measure academic performance in addition to GPA.

The impact of determinants on university students' academic performance has been the subject of ongoing discussions in Sri Lanka among educators and policymakers. Students' academic performance will suffer as a result of poor grades. It will also have a negative impact on their overall performance, degree class, career, employment, and social status. This research is primarily concerned with the causes of poor academic performance. The main issue here is that students performed admirably in receiving entry qualifications with high marks, but only about 10% of them maintain their previous level of performance. As a result, the current study investigates factors influencing the academic performance of undergraduates at a state university in Sri Lanka. The primary goal is to identify the most important factors influencing undergraduate academic achievement.

As soon as they graduate, undergraduates become the primary source of the workforce. If they do not succeed in their academic performance at the university, it will have a negative impact on their future. If they drop out of university, they will have a difficult time finding work in the labour market. This, however, will lead to societal issues such as young dissatisfaction, stress, and anti-government actions. Furthermore, this situation limits employment and, as a result, has an impact on the country's economic development. As a result, academic performance among university students receives the most attention because it is a national issue affecting students, academics, administrative personnel, politicians, and development practitioners. As a result, determining the factors influencing undergraduate academic success will aid in resolving this issue.

Finally, this study will be beneficial to a wide range of parties. Undergraduates are the primary beneficiaries. The findings of this study will help to improve undergraduate performance by addressing the factors that influence academic performance. Throughout this study, the actual reasons for the undergraduates' academic performance can be determined. Under this setting, the impact of lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, studying time, family background, and self-motivation on academic performance can be identified. Following that, the university's academic and administrative staff can directly apply the research findings to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of academic programs. The findings of this study would also be useful to policymakers and development practitioners. They would ensure that the government's limited resources were used efficiently and effectively. And to address the flaws in the current educational system. This research study also contributes to our understanding of academic performance in higher education institutions and practice in developing and managing higher education programs.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no previous research has been conducted that evaluates the factors influencing undergraduate academic achievement at a Sri

Lankan state university. This will be the first study of its kind in this field. As a study based on factors influencing undergraduate academic performance, the author believes this research will help close a literature gap. The primary goal of this study is to identify factors influencing the academic performance of undergraduates at a Sri Lankan state university.

Furthermore, there are five specific objectives: the first is to determine whether students' lecture attendance affects academic performance, the second is to determine whether students' English knowledge affects academic performance, the third is to determine whether time spent on studying affects academic performance, the fourth is to determine whether students' family background affects academic performance, and the fifth is to determine whether students' self-motivation affects academic performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The author conducted a review of studies on this topic that were relevant and valid. Undergraduate academic performance and factors that affect academic performance are researched to provide a conducive environment for the study to continue. Another term for academic performance is academic achievement. "Academic performance is the assessment of student achievement in a variety of academic subjects" (Anon., 2021). Furthermore, Banquil et al. (2009) define academic performance as "how students deal with their studies and how they cope with or accomplish various tasks assigned to them by their teachers" (Fernando, 2017).

The academic performance serves as an evaluative system and a source of information for educational institutions. Previous studies used CGPA, test scores, and grades to assess academic performance. GPA/CGPA has been used in many studies to assess academic performance (Fernando, 2017; Priyadarshan and Kumari, 2020; Harb and El-Shaarawi, 2006; Mushtaq and Khan, 2012; Ali et al., 2009; Ghenghesh, 2015; Plant et al., 2005; Hedjazi and Omid, 2008). Some studies used test scores/grades (Ali et al., 2013; Kyoshiba, 2009; Aina et al., 2013).

Some studies, however, did not use either of the above and instead used other indicators to assess academic performance. Ansari et al. used a 5-point Likert Scale to assess academic performance using two indicators. They are students' internal reflections on their academic performance as well as their subjective comparative assessment of their overall academic performance (Ansari et al., 2020). Ainin et al. (2015) investigated Facebook usage, socialization, and academic performance in 2015 using the 5-point Likert Scale to assess academic performance with two items. They have used phrases such as, "I am confident in the adequacy of my academic skills and abilities, and I feel competent conducting my course assignments".

The study investigated whether students' attendance at lectures improved their academic performance. Many researchers have identified lecture/class attendance as an important factor influencing students' academic performance.

Fernando (2017) investigated the factors that influence academic performance among undergraduates at the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce of the University of Sri Jayawardhanapura. A structured questionnaire was used to collect responses from 200 students. According to the findings, students' attendance at lectures has a positive and significant ($p < 0.001$) impact on academic success. A student who attends the majority of classes believes that doing so will help him or her get better grades. Priyadarshana and Kumari (2020) conducted a similar study on 91 graduate students from the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce at the University of Sri Jayawardhanapura in Sri Lanka. The main analytical tools employed in this study were correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. Findings show a positive correlation between lecture attendance and academic performance and that lecture attendance is a significant factor when evaluating academic performance. The relevance of interactive learning was demonstrated by the considerable positive link between lecture attendance and GPA. Cheung and Kan (2002) backed up their findings by stating that attending lectures and tutorials is very important for achieving a decent grade on the final test.

Stanca (2014) used panel data to investigate the effect of attendance on academic performance for Introductory Microeconomic students at the University of Milan. According to a 766-student study, attendance has a positive and significant impact on academic performance (Stanca, 2014). Harb and El-Shaarawi investigated factors influencing student performance using 864 students from the College of Business and Economics at the United Arab Emirates University. The study concluded that missing too many lectures has a negative impact on student's performance. According to the study, missing too many lectures is the most important factor that has a negative impact on student's performance (Harb and El-Shaarawi, 2006).

Many studies have found that knowing English has a significant impact on academic performance (Fernando, 2017; Priyadarshana and Kumari, 2020; Harb and El-Shaarawi, 2006; David, 2014; Fakude, 2012; Aina et al., 2013; Ghenghesh, 2013). Ali et al. (2013) evaluated the factors influencing students' academic performance using a sample of 100 students from Islamia University Sub Campus. Using a linear regression model, correlation analysis, and descriptive analysis, this study discovered that daily study hours significantly impact graduate students' academic performance.

Yogendra (2017) investigated the factors influencing GPA in third-year commerce and management students at Eastern University in Sri Lanka. A high level of GPA is obtained by devoting a significant amount of time to studies. Furthermore, according to the researchers, efficient time spent studying allows students to work their way through their studies in a systematic manner, breaking tasks down into smaller, more easily accomplished sub-tasks. In any case, Yogendra (2017) reports a lack of academic research on the effect of studying on academic performance has been reported by Stinebrickner (2007). Yogendra (2017) discovered that family background has a significant impact on academic performance. However, many previous studies examined parents' income and education level to examine family background.

According to Ali et al. (2009), students from higher-income families outperform those from lower-income families in academic assessments. Similarly, Checchi (2002) discovered that wealthier parents invest more in their children's education. The study of factors influencing students' academic performance at Islamia University Sub Campus discovered that fathers/guardians' socioeconomic status has a significant impact on academic performance. The study discovered a positive relationship between income and student performance, implying that high-income parents are to blame for their children's high test scores (Ali et al., 2013).

Kyoshaba (2009) investigates the factors influencing undergraduate student performance at Uganda Christian University. The data collected from three hundred and forty (340) respondents were analyzed using a correlation in the study. The data showed a link between parents' socioeconomic status and their children's academic performance. Furthermore, data show that the higher a parent's socioeconomic status, the higher their children's academic performance. Parental education, family income, and parental occupation were used to determine parents' socioeconomic status. Furthermore, the study suggests that parents' socioeconomic status is important because they provide high levels of psychological support for their children by creating conditions that promote the development of abilities required for academic achievement.

According to a study of factors influencing an agricultural student's academic success at the University of Tehran, there is a significant positive correlation between motivation and student academic success. This study was carried out using the responses of 94 junior undergraduate students, and data was collected using questionnaires. It also concludes that motivation is an important factor in student's academic success (Hedjazi and Omidi, 2008). Fernando (2017) also discovered a significant ($p < 0.01$) and positive relationship between self-motivation and academic success. This study chose four items to dig deeper into self-motivation. Specifically, I can deal with exam stress, manage my academic workload, enjoy lectures in my degree, and am interested in the majority of the courses I am taking. In this study, these four items explained 56.883 total variations in the concept of self-motivation. Finally, this study discovered that self-motivation is a predictor of academic performance.

Almalki (2019) conducted a study to determine the effect of motivation on academic performance among undergraduate dentistry students. A cross-sectional survey of 187 undergraduate dentistry students from the main dental colleges in Saudi Arabia's Riyadh region was conducted using an electronic questionnaire. In this study, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) was used to assess motivation, and the results revealed a positive relationship between academic performance and motivation. Furthermore, the study discovered that the eagerness to learn influences the academic performance of dentistry students.

3. METHODOLOGY

Because the concept is derived from the reviewed literature, this study takes a deductive approach by using the positivism philosophy. The author decides to collect

data only from questionnaires sent to undergraduates in order to determine the factors influencing academic achievement. As a result, the current study can be classified as a single-method quantitative study. Morgan's Table was used to determine the research sample size of 348.

The conceptual framework depicts the factors influencing undergraduate academic performance (Figure 1). As a result of an extensive literature review, the author identified five independent variables (lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, time spent studying, family background, and self-motivation).

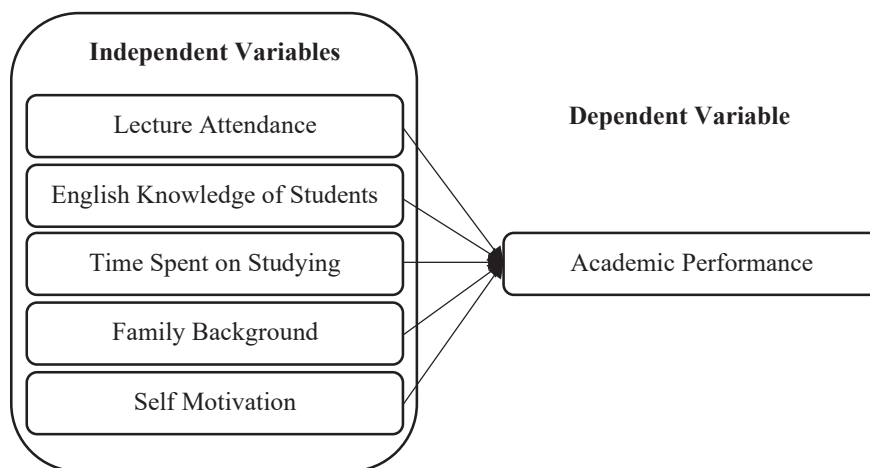


Figure 4. Conceptual Diagram

Moreover, to address developed research questions author develops a hypothesis.

H1: There is a significant effect of students' lecture attendance on academic performance

H2: There is a significant effect of the f English knowledge of the students on academic performance.

H3: There is a significant effect of time spent on studying on academic performance

H4: There is a significant effect of students' family background on academic performance

H5: There is a significant effect of self-motivation of the students on academic performance

These hypotheses were analysed using descriptive statistics, preliminary statistics, and inferential statistics techniques via SPSS.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The survey was sent to 348 university undergraduates from six faculties, ranging from level 2 to level 4. The study received responses from 34% of male students and 66% of female students. These responses included 30% level 2 undergraduates, 30% level

3 undergraduates, and 40% level 4 undergraduates. In addition, respondents came from all faculties. Based on a sample of 348 students, 13 per cent were from Applied Science, 19 per cent were from Agriculture and Plantation Management, 11 per cent were from Livestock, Fisheries and Nutrition, 42 per cent were from Business Studies and Finance, 12 per cent were from the Faculty of Technology, and 2 per cent were from the Faculty of Medicine. The reliability of the surveyed data was first tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which demonstrated that the data has an acceptable level of internal consistency. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Table 16. Correlation Table

	AP	LA	EN	TS	FA	SM
AP	1	0.467** (0.000)	0.372** (0.000)	0.394** (0.000)	0.184** (0.001)	0.546** (0.000)
LA	0.467** (0.000)	1	0.229** (0.000)	0.437** (0.000)	0.233** (0.000)	0.314** (0.000)
EN	0.372** (0.000)	0.229** (0.000)	1	0.056 (0.296)	0.405** (0.000)	0.359** (0.000)
TS	0.394** (0.000)	0.437** (0.000)	0.056 (0.296)	1	0.015 (0.776)	0.302** (0.000)
FA	0.184** (0.001)	0.233** (0.000)	0.405** (0.000)	0.015 (0.776)	1	0.068 (0.209)
SM	0.546** (0.000)	0.314** (0.000)	0.359** (0.000)	0.302** (0.000)	0.068 (0.209)	1

Using regression analysis, the overall impact of all independent variables on academic performance was determined. In addition, the outcome was useful in deciding whether to accept or reject the derived hypothesis. The author created a model that includes all independent variables and has an R-value of 0.664, indicating a moderate correlation between dependent and independent variables. The R square value was determined to be 0.441, with a statistical significance of P0.05. This means that 44.1 per cent of academic performance variations are predicted by lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, time spent studying, family background, and self-motivation.

Based on the significant values in table 2, it is possible to conclude that lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, time spent studying, and self-motivation all have a significant positive impact on academic achievement. These findings are consistent with those of Fernando (2017), Priyadarshana and Kumari (2020), Harb and El-Shaarawi (2006), David (2014), Fakude (2012), Aina et al. (2013), Ghenghesh (2015), Ali et al. (2013), and Yogendra (2017). Furthermore, the findings show that self-motivation is the most important variable. According to the findings of the study, the family background does not affect academic performance. It contradicts the findings of Ali et al. (2009) and Kyoshaba (2010).

Table 2. Coefficient Table

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Constant	1.227	0.150		8.205	0.000	0.933	1.521
LA	0.125	0.026	0.231	4.858	0.000	0.075	0.176
EN	0.115	0.033	0.166	3.478	0.001	0.050	0.179
TS	0.122	0.032	0.175	3.789	0.000	0.059	0.185
FA	0.029	0.036	0.036	0.805	0.422	-0.042	0.100
SM	0.249	0.032	0.358	7.738	0.000	0.186	0.312

a. *Dependent Variable: Academic Performance*

5. CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this study was to identify the factors influencing the academic performance of undergraduates at Sri Lanka's A state university. Furthermore, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge on academic performance. The survey was sent to 348 state university undergraduates. The dependent variable in the study was academic performance, and the five independent variables were drawn from the existing literature. Students' attendance at lectures, English knowledge, time spent studying, family background, and self-motivation are independent variables in this study.

For the study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from 348 undergraduates at the state university. The questionnaire had three main sections: demographic factors, independent variables, and dependent variables. The author used a Likert scale and yes/no questions to collect data. SPSS software was used to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics, preliminary statistical analysis, and inferential statistics were used to test the study's hypotheses. The results of the correlation and regression analyses aided in achieving the study's ultimate goal. According to the findings, there is a significant positive effect of lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, time spent studying, and self-motivation on the academic performance of undergraduates at a Sri Lankan state university.

This study on factors influencing the academic performance of undergraduates at Sri Lanka's A state university highlights the survey results in a precise manner, achieving the study's specific objectives. Students' attendance at lectures has an impact on their academic performance. This study discovered that attending lectures significantly positively affects academic performance. Students' English proficiency has an impact on their academic performance. According to the findings, it is possible to conclude that students' English knowledge has a significant positive effect on their academic performance.

Academic performance is influenced by the amount of time spent studying. Time spent studying has a significant positive effect on academic performance. Academic performance is unaffected by a student's family background. According to the authors' findings, family background has a negligible positive effect on academic

performance. Students' self-motivation has an impact on their academic performance. Based on the findings, the author concludes that self-motivation has a significant positive effect on academic performance. Furthermore, self-motivation is the most important factor influencing academic performance.

Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrated that all research questions were correctly answered. The author also met the research objectives to identify factors influencing undergraduate academic performance. Finally, the researcher's overall study can conclude that independent variables (lecture attendance, students' English knowledge, time spent studying, and self-motivation) are significantly positively associated with academic performance.

The study looked at the academic performance of undergraduates at a Sri Lankan state university. Based on the findings and conclusion, the author developed the following recommendations to improve academic performance. The most crucial aspect of this research is self-motivation. Students who have a strong sense of self-motivation will achieve more. Undergraduates should also be able to deal with exam stress and academic strain effectively. Furthermore, in order to achieve better academic performance, students must select subjects that are of interest to them. Another factor influencing academic performance is students' attendance at lectures. Undergraduates must attend the majority of lectures and must believe that doing so will help them achieve better academic performance.

Time spent studying is another factor that influences academic performance. In this regard, students must devote more time to studying, and that time must be spent wisely in order to achieve a positive outcome. Another factor influencing students' academic performance is their command of the English language. Students should be able to read, write, speak, and understand English. If this is the case, they may be able to improve academic performance by removing the language barrier.

The study's findings will provide a guide for undergraduates looking to improve their academic performance. Furthermore, these findings will assist lecturers and administration in observing and taking necessary steps to improve academic performance at this Sri Lankan state university.

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