Factors Influencing 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 influence 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 99 final yearstudents from Bachelor of Business Administration programme of the Faculty of Commerce and Management, Eastern University, Sri Lanka. The academic performance was gauged using General Performance Aggregate (GPA) based on the academic year examination results, SPSS version 22 was applied for data analysis.

The finding indicates that the learning environment is less influential on the students' performance at the examinations.

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 Amorose2008).

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, butnot at the higher level. The literature reveals that students; performance at the examination are affected by many factors.

However the direct relationship between those factors and academic performance

isnot known. The purpose of this study is to address thisissue focusing on academic performance of undergraduate students.

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 level of the 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 informationis expected to assist academics and administrators to design relevant policiesand procedures.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

With respect to undergraduate students the study specifically seeks to:

1. Identifythe level of the learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management of the Eastern University Sri Lanka
2. Toidentify the level of 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 academicsand administrators in tertiarylevel education as well educationists in making relevant recommendation to the policymakers especially those dealing with quality assurance and the central admissions. Thefindings will reveal what relevant policies and strategies need to be employed toimprove academic performance at higher learning institutions. The findings will helpthe University Academic and administrative office to review its contents of the programmes and methods of delivery in order toimprove academic performance.

1.6 Scope of the study

International Journal of Research

Available at https://edupediapublications.org/journals

e-ISSN: 2348-6848
p-ISSN: 2348-795X
Volume 05 Issue-01
January 2018

The study was conducted at the Eastern University, Sri Lanka, using finalyear students from Bachelor of Business Administration programme of the from the Faculty of Commerce and Management. Variables attributing to students' academic performance inexamination at Eastern University, Sri Lanka focus on factors such as demographic and learning environment, which affect academic performance of undergraduate students. The study covered theperiod of academic year 2014/2015.

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.

2.1 Students performance in Developing Countries

In developing countries 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 includeextracurricular activities, family problems, financial, social and otherproblems.

Harb and El-Shaarawi (2006) found that the most important factor with positive effecton students' performance is student's competence in communication. The authors foundthat 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 bycommunication skills; it is possible to see

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

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

Schiefelbein and Simmon, (1981) identified socio-economic status (SES) as asignificant predictor of academic outcomes. It is usually a composite measure of parents'occupation, incomes and education. Upper income children may tend to learn thelanguage skills and other behaviors rewarded by institution. They also have access tobooks, literate parents, toys and other conditions at home. Parent training of the poorcould offset some of these advantages. Their finding also reveals that the optimalnumber of students

per class is an important policy issue because of its costimplications. In 9 of 14 studies relating the effects of class size to student achievement, larger class size was associated with lower student's performance.

In their study Farooq et al, (2011) concluded that the higher level of SES is the bestindicator 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 girlsperforming 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

comprehensibleunderstanding of the factors that benefit and hinder the academic progress of an individual's education. However, Karemera (2003) found no statistical evidence ofsignificant association between family income level and academic performance of thestudent.

Kasirye (2009) found that the most important determinants are: the number of teacherswith 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 educationattainment 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 headteacher 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 thedeterminants of academic performance. The study found that communication, learningfacilities, proper guidance and family stress are the factors that affect the studentperformance. Communication, learning facilities and proper guidance showed asignificant positive impact on the student performance while family stress had negativeimpact on the student performance. Family stress was found to reduce the performanceof the student.

3. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Following conceptual framework was developed based on literature survey. This conceptual framework highlights the learning environment and students' performanceat the examination.
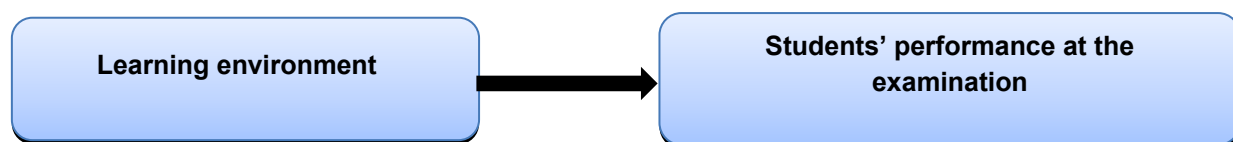

Fig. 1. Figure conceptual model

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

students' performance at the examination increases whenthe 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 17 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 379, the number of students from the final year of the BBA programme is 99, thus the total 99 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 99 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 99respondents. Independent sample t-Test was run to test whether or not Gender has impact on students' performance at the examinations. ANOVA was run in order to determine whether or year of study and religion have an impact on English Language Proficiency. Statistical package of SPSS 22.0 has been used for this purpose. Furthermore criteria shown in table 1 were adopted to evaluate mean values. This was established to determine the degree English Language Proficiency.

Table 1. Decision rule for univariateanalysis for independent variable

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

Table 2. Decision rule for univariateanalysis for dependent variable

GPA Range	Decision attributes
$1 \leq X_i < 2.0$	Low level
$2.0 \leq X_i < 3.0$	Moderate level
$3.0 \leq X_i \leq .4.0$	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 for this study. It consists of 379 students, from those 99 students of the final year study Programme as per the Table 3. Hence 78 students were responded to the questionnaires and the response rate of this study is 79%.

Table 3. Sample and Response rate

Year of study	Gender	Number of Students	Proportion	Number of respondents	Proportion	Response rate
Final Year	Male	47	48	33	42	70%
	Female	52	52	45	58	86%
Total		**99**	**100%**	**78**	**100%**	**79%**

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 Liket's scale which represent "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" of between 1 to 5. Meanwhile mean values were evaluated based on the established evaluative criteria which range from "Low level" to "High level".

5.3 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The personal characteristics of the respondents such as gender and religion were asked in the questionnaire. Thedetails of the demographic profiles of the participants show that 42% (n=33) of participants were male and 52 % (n=45) were female (Table 3). Among the respondents 27% (n=21) of the respondents were budist; 47% (n=37) of the respondents were hindu; 08% (n=06) of the respondents were muslim; and 18% (n=14) of the respondents were Christians (Table 4).

Table 4.Religion of students

Religious Category	Number of Students	Proportion
Budist	21	27
Hindu	37	47
Muslim	06	08
Christian	14	18
Total	**78**	**100%**

Source-Data analysis

5.4 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 5, 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 5. Summary of the findings on Learning Environment

Independent Variable	Mean	Std. deviation
Learning Environment	3.66	0.69

Source-Data analysis

The data presented in Table 6, revealed that most of the respondents fall under the moderate level. The details of the GPA of the respondents indicated that 59% (n=46) of them secured moderate level GPA between $2.0 \leq Xi < 3.0$; 23% (n=18) of the respondents reported that they secured lower level GPA between $1 \leq Xi < 2.0$; and only 18% (n=14) of the respondents secured

higher level GPA between $3.0 \leq Xi \leq 4.0$ (table 6). Considering the GPA values of the respondents it revealed that the average value of the GPA of the respondents were between the moderate range with the GPA score of 2.89. therefore based on the GPA status of the respondents it could be stated that students' performance at the examination is at the moderate level at the

International Journal of Research
Available at https://edupediapublications.org/journals

e-ISSN: 2348-6848
p-ISSN: 2348-795X
Volume 05 Issue-01
January 2018

faculty of commerce and management, of

the Eastern University Sri Lanka.

Table 6.**Students' performance at the examinations**

GPA Range	Decision attributes	Number of Students	Proportion
$1 \leq Xi < 2.0$	Low level	18	23
$2.0 \leq Xi < 3.0$	Moderate level	46	59
$3.0 \leq Xi \leq 4.0$	High level	14	18
Total		**78**	**100%**

Source- Formed for this research

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.

Universities are focusing on to the world class status and the programs offered by them are transferrable across relevant higher education institutions and even across countries. These could be possible by higher level of performance of students; at the examinations. The students who excel in the semester Examinations would enjoy the efforts taken by the institution and by them at the maximum. Therefore, identifying the factors influencing their performance at the semester examinations is very important.

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 is at high level. But the performance of the students at the examinations was at the moderate level.

Many researchers have attempted to identify the variables that predict academic success. According to Kuh et al (2007) academic success of the student are influenced by student background characteristics, such as demographic and other pre-university experiences, the structural characteristics of the institution, such as its size, mission and admission criteria, student-faculty interactions, interactions with university staff, and interactions with peers, student's perception of the learning environment, the quality of effort, or achievement behaviors, of students in educationally purposeful situations.

Further, the study revealed that even though the level of learning environment is at the higher level at the faculty of commerce and management in the Eastern university Sri Lanka, the performance of the students at the examination was at the moderate level which indicated that other factors noted by Kuh et at (2007) have more influential than the learning environment at the faculty of commerce and management in the Eastern university Sri Lanka.

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