



# **Factors Lead to Poor Academic Performance among Students: A Case Study of Omani Students**

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## **Abstract**

*In contemporary educational landscapes, a primary concern among educators, syllabus designers, and curriculum developers is the prevalence of subpar academic performance. This issue is particularly exacerbated in non-English speaking countries where English serves as the medium of instruction in tertiary education, yet students receive a limited exposure to English prior to commencing their studies. To investigate the underlying causes of poor academic performance among students in non-English speaking countries such as Oman, a comprehensive analysis of 151 essays penned by students who enrolled in the Post Foundation program at Salalah College of Technology was conducted. The contributing factors to students' low academic achievements were categorized into four primary domains: students-related factors, teacher-related factors, family-related factors, and other factors such as marriage, toxic friendship, and transportation problems. The findings of this analysis revealed that while student-related factors exert the most significant influence, teacher-related factors exhibit the least impact.*

**Keywords:** *Academic Performance, student-related factors, Teacher-related factors, Family-related factors*

## **Introduction**

A comprehensive understanding of educational objectives and student needs is essential for academic success. Extensive research, including studies conducted by Cascio (2015), and Rahamneh (2012) has identified several key factors that significantly influence student achievement. These factors encompass inadequate evaluation methods, heightened stress and emotional challenges such as low motivation, ineffective teaching approaches, and a mismatch between instructional materials and student learning needs. Oman, as a society with English as a second language, is not immune to the challenges of low academic performance among students. In Oman, English is the primary medium of instruction in higher education institutions. Research on ELT in Oman reveals that many students who complete high school (Grade 12) and enroll in public or private universities struggle to utilize English effectively for social, personal, and academic purposes Al-Issa, (2009b). Keeping in mind that most Omani high school graduates have a limited understanding of the expectations of the higher education system, it is not unpredictable to see the students who are not interested in participating classroom discussion, finding the subject/course boring, being absent frequently and get low marks in exams.

## **Statement of Problem**

A student's academic performance is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. By identifying and addressing the root causes of these factors, significant achievement can be realized. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused was on students' performance from the perspective of academics, this study adopts a student-wise approach. It aims to examine the factors that contribute to poor academic performance from the students' own viewpoints. The data for this study encompasses the comments and opinions of Omani students who enrolled in a Post Foundation Program at Salalah



College of Technology (SCT) in 2015. Identifying the negative factors that hinder students' academic achievements contributes to exploring potential strategies to mitigate their impact.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Identifying the sources of the factors that lead to students' poor performance and how they intertwine with each other in various learning settings attracted the attention of academicians in the recent years. The present study aims:

1. To explore the potential factors that may correlate in meaningful ways with the poor academic performance of Omani students at SCT.
2. To classify these factors according to their impact on students' performance

In line with the abovementioned objectives, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What student-related factors could be the causes of SCT students' poor academic performance?
2. What teacher-related factors contribute to the low academic performance of students at SCT
3. What family-related factors cause SCT students perform academically poor?
4. What are other factors that affect SCT students' low achievement?

### **Literature Review**

The prevalence of poor academic performance among students is a significant concern for educators. Various factors can contribute to this issue, including geographical location, cultural and historical background, educational approaches, and students' general knowledge. Sequeiral and Gurge-Giannetti (2011) define poor school performance as "a school achievement below the expected for a given age, cognitive skills, and schooling". They categorize the causes of PSP into two primary groups: pedagogical difficulties and diseases or disabilities. They suggest that pushing students beyond their capabilities, skills and interests can lead to disengagement, demotivation, and ultimately frustration, failure, and low self-esteem.

Karande and Kulkarni (2005) propose a similar framework, categorizing the factors affecting students' performance into three groups: biological (student-born factors), psychological, and social. They argue that some students may have below-average intelligence (IQ), while others may face psychological or social barriers to learning. From psychological perspective we need to know whether our students are actually ready to learn and/ or like to learn. And socially, is the environment conducive and stimulating enough for ideal learning? Do students have access to necessary materials that contribute to learning? Karande and Kulkarni (2005, p.961) in their study propose several reasons for children's low performance among which are medical problems, below average intelligent, specific learning disability, emotional problems and environmental causes. To address this complex issue, they suggest that the focus should shift from the classroom to the broader context such as family, environment, and society in which students live.

Rahmaneh (2012) investigated the causes of poor academic achievement among Jordanian school students. The study involved 100 teachers who completed a 30-item questionnaire. The results revealed that the primary reasons for low academic performance centered on student focus (89.6%), followed by the school environment (79%) and family factors (69.6%).



Roche et al. (Cited in Al Mahrooqi and Denman 2015) advocated for the inclusion of orientation programs in all Omani Foundation Programs. These programs explicitly draw new intake students' attention to differences between high school and university classrooms, emphasizing the significance of active student participation, the use of criteria –based assessment than pass/fail policies. Additionally the programs should address expectation regarding classroom practices i.e., students are required to actively participate in spoken and written tasks instead of memorizing passages and independent study habit outside the class. Such formal orientation programs could serve as a crucial step in addressing the low performance issue of Omani students.

## Research Method

### Sample Population

The current study aimed to examine the factors contributing to poor academic performance among Post Foundation Program students at SCT. The research focused on analyzing essays written by students enrolled in the English Technical Writing II course during the second semester of the AY 2014-2015. For mid-semester exam, students have already been instructed to write a 5-paragraph cause or effect essay. They were provided by two topics and were asked to elaborate on one of the topics. To pursue the objectives of this study, 151 essays out of 180 were collected upon receiving approval from level coordinator and exam committee. The essays with 'Causes of poor performance' topic were separated and analyzed for the purpose of this study.

### Findings

The result of analyzing 151 essays written by Omani students revealed four primary factors at macro level influencing low performance: student-related factors (76.72%), teacher-related factors (5.4%), family-related factors (8.37%) and other factors (9.49%). These other factors included issues such as toxic friendships, marriage, employment, health problems, transportation difficulties and financial constraints. The table below outlines the various factors and their corresponding percentages.

**Table 1.** Summary of Macro Factors for Students Poor Performance

Type of factor	percentage
Student-related factors	76.72%
Family-related factors	8.37%
Teacher-related factors	5.40%
Other factors	9.49%

The analysis reveals that while student-related factors constitute the primary reason for poor academic performance, other factors such as transportation, financial difficulties, and family issues also play a significant role.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the various student –related problems, presented in a hierarchical order.

**Table 2.** Summary of Student-Related Factors at Micro Level

cause	Percentage
NO engagement in studying/ NO reviewing lessons at home	16.50%



Frequent absenteeism/ irregular class attendance	15.04%
- Difficulty in understanding the subject matter/ perceiving it as challenging and uninteresting - Feeling sleepy in the classroom	6.79%
NO focus during lectures	6.31%
Coming late to class/ exam	5.58%
- Mobile phone - Not do homework/ assignments at home	5.09%
Tardiness	4.61%
Dislike to study	4.36%
Not understanding the language used by teacher	3.64%
Talking with classmates	2.91%
Dislike teacher	2.42%
Have no plan for future	1.69%
- Shyness/ uncomfortable in mixed classes - Not caring for education	1.45%
Dislike college	1.21%
- Cheating - Difficulty in understanding English	0.72%
- Leaving classroom when feel bored - Not following college rules - Improper attitude (not respecting teachers, Laughing in classroom, quarreling with classmate) - - Doing something to make teacher angry - Spending too much time with friends - Change of life style because of living away from family - Having no idea why he/she comes to college - - Difficult exams	0.48%
- Not taking subject/ course seriously - Memory problem - Lack of motivation - Having exam phobia - Low marks in exam - No timetable for daily life	0.24%

The primary contributing factor to underperformance, as depicted in the above table, was students' failure to fulfill their academic obligations. Specifically, a significant percentage of students (16.5%) did not engage in studying or reviewing course materials outside of the classroom.

Students identified a common obstacle to academic success: dissatisfaction with their chosen field of study. Some students expressed uncertainty about their major, attributing the selection to parental preference. Others encountered significant challenges in pursuing their chosen fields. While students often



select courses based on factors like interest without fully understanding their capability, it is essential to recognize the need for self-assessment and adaptability. By understanding their own development and adjusting their goals and decisions accordingly, students can better align their academic pursuits with their personal growth.

Many students attribute their academic struggles in college to their lack of proficiency in the English Language. A common issue they face is difficulty in comprehending their teachers, especially since the majority of lecturers are non-Omani. This language barrier discourages students from participating in class discussions, asking questions or providing answers. Given that most courses are taught in English, it is essential for students to develop strong reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in the language. A deficiency in any of these skills can significantly contribute to academic failure.

Living away from home and family, forming new relationships with peers both within and outside of the academic environment, and adjusting to lifestyle changes due to increased freedom causes significant challenges for students who relocate for their studies. Homesickness and nostalgia, along with unproductive use of time are common consequences of these adjustments, often compounded by toxic friendships.

For some students, the significance of higher education is not fully understood. While they may recognize the necessity of obtaining a degree, they often fail to appreciate its true value. Observing how students allocate their time reveals that only a small fraction of their day is devoted to studying or completing assignments. Though hard work and dedication are crucial for academic success, many students prioritize social activities over their studies.

Academic dishonesty, such as cheating on exams or plagiarizing assignments, has become increasingly prevalent with the advancement of technology. This behavior may include using mobile devices to search for information during exams or texting answers to other students, both of which contribute to academic failure.

Another factor affecting academic performance is boredom. Several factors may cause this, such as boring course materials or a mismatch between students' existing knowledge and the content being taught in class.

### **Family-Related Factors**

Family plays a critical role in a student's academic performance. Family problems of different types are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Summary of Micro Family-Related Factors

Cause	Percentage
-uneducated parents	80%
- big family	
- problem with parents	
Parents have no idea how to treat/ bring up children	6.66%
- Divorced parents	4.44%
- Poor family	
- Permissive parents/ no discipline	2.22%
- Family life style	





Table 3 provides an overview of family-related issues that contribute to students' poor academic performance. The majority of students (80%) attribute these issues to having uneducated parents, as well as generational conflicts. Parental involvement plays a vital role in children's' academic success. When parents are uneducated, they often fail to understand the value of education or the importance of their children's' academic progress. Consequently, they may not prioritize their children's academic performance in school or college.

Daily family responsibilities, such as household chores, and job-related tasks, also hinder academic achievement if not managed properly. For instance, living in large families with six or seven siblings is a common scenario for many SCT students, making it challenging for them to concentrate on their studies and complete homework. In many cases, older siblings bear additional responsibilities, such as caring for younger siblings, helping them with schoolwork, and managing household duties in the absence of parents. These obligations often prevent students from dedicating sufficient time and energy to their own academic tasks.

Another issue arises from parental attitudes toward child-rearing. Some parents lack an understanding of how to effectively discipline or educate their children, as indicted by students' writings. They need to instill proper moral value, such as respecting teachers and others in society.

Additionally, financial difficulties within the family, often due to factors like parental death or divorce, can divert students' attention from academics, as they prioritize basic survival over educational pursuits.

### Teacher-Related Factors

Professional qualifications are important in education. Qualified teacher is an essential ingredient for students' success. The role a teacher plays in student's performance is undeniable. There is a fact that when things go wrong in the area of academics, teachers are always blamed. In other words, in most cases teachers are responsible for students' low achievements. Table 3 shows the factors that pertain to the role of teachers in the failure of the SCT students as mentioned in their essays.

**Table 4.** Summary of teacher-related factors

Cause	percentage
Disqualified/incompetent teacher	68.96%
- Boring teacher	6.89%
- Teacher's behavior/ manner	
- Ineffective teaching methodology	3.44%
- Poor classroom management skill	
- Lack of knowledge about the subject	
- Not using technology in teaching	

As it is illustrated in the above table, students tend to blame their teachers for their poor academic performance due to the way the lesson is presented and the subject is not explained clearly. According to Omani students, some teachers do not explain the lesson clearly, they do not help students when they need, do not give homework to practice the taught material and do not emphasize on the important points. Among the factors that make a teacher incompetent in teaching are experience and passion. For example, inexperienced teacher or a teacher with no passion for teaching is unable to help students to



get comprehensive idea of the subject matter. A teacher's skill in presenting material, engaging students in classroom discussions and encouraging students in doing assignments contributes to the deep comprehension of the given topic. Professional qualifications are important in education. The professional skill of the teacher 'establishes a productive classroom atmosphere from the start by means of good organization and carefully planned teaching structures' (Farrant, 1980, p. 169). In addition, some teachers have classroom management problem which may lead to extreme authoritarianism or vice versa uncontrollable classroom atmosphere which in turn hinder fruitful class discussions and collaborative learning

### Other Factors

Besides the factors discussed above, there are other reasons for SCT students' poor college performance. Table 5 shows these factors.

**Table 5.** Summary of Other Contributing Factors to Students' Poor Performance

Cause	Percentage
Toxic friendship	56.86%
Financial problem	15.68%
Health problem	13.72%
- Marriage	3.91%
- Transportation problem	
- Smoking	1.96%
- Working while attending at college	
- educational system	

Generally a friend can affect our life in one way or another. Making toxic friendship and its influence on SCT students' poor performance has the highest percentage among the other factors. Among the negative effects of bad friend are; negative attitude toward college and education, disrespect teachers, smoking and dismissing lessons.

Despite the fact that SCT is a public college under Ministry of Manpower supervision and students do not have to pay any tuition, financial problem is among the issues discussed by the students in their essays. Cooper and Stewart (2013) believe that "Money in early childhood makes most difference to cognitive outcomes, while in later childhood and adolescence it makes more difference to social and behavioral outcomes". A study by Sum and Fogg (1991) emphasizes the correlation between poverty and students achievement. In their study, poor students' achievement ranked 19th percentile on assessments whereas students from a mid-upper income families ranked 66th percentile on assessments (Cited in Lacour1 & Tissington, 2011). The impact of low income on the welfare of family directly/indirectly may lead to low performance when family is unable to provide a peaceful atmosphere for children and facilities like car for transportation.

The negative association between smoking and academic achievement has been studied by different institutions. The results of a survey by National Youth Risk Behavior in 2009 show that students with higher grades are less likely to engage in smoking than their classmates with lower grades, and students who do not engage in smoking receive higher grades than their classmates who smoke. Smoking is a big



problem among male students at SCT. It is a typical behavior of SCT male students to leave class for smoking.

## **Conclusion**

Education is a cornerstone of human development. Psychological research indicates that poor academic performance not only undermines learner's self-esteem, but also causes stress to the parents.

In Oman, the due to insufficient effort exerted by many students to pass elementary and high school examinations often hinders their ability to meet the rigorous demands of the higher education. During primary and secondary schooling, students often allocate minimum time to studying. Consequently, new college students often harbor the misconception that college/university courses will operate in a similar way to their HS counterparts. However, upon commencing their tertiary studies, they quickly realize the need for significantly increased effort. Therefore, to succeed in their university courses, students must adapt their study habits and approach to learning.

In an educational setting where the goal is to "get a degree" instead of "to become educated" the path is easy and can be achieved with the least effort. A student may get high marks but might simply not care enough about education to exert the effort. Improving passing standards in a way that only qualified students can pass exams would be of great help. In this way students have to put forth more effort because the expectations have been increased.

Absenteeism, lateness and irregular college attendance are certain factors that are believed to be responsible for general poor academic performances. As a consequence, students are unable to catch up with what was taught in class and are always behind. Thus, the strict rules for frequent absences should be followed without any exceptional case and flexibility.

In addition, Omani students need to be encouraged to use English as they converse with their classmates in and out classroom. The more they use English in their daily communications, the broader the range of vocabulary will be. It helps them to understand non- Omani teachers and the textbooks.

The findings of the current study contributes to come to some conclusions among them are: 1) students need to understand subject matter they are taught, 2) tasks needs to be localized culturally, 3) students need to be present in class regularly, 4) college rules and regulations should be strict and 5) the competitive environment could be conducive and stimulating for surface learners to motivate them to reflect on their learning and spend more time for learning. Bearing in mind that there is a positive relationship between doing homework and learning outcomes, teachers need to assign homework that is related to the learning objectives (Alami, 2016). Homework should be assigned regularly in reasonable amounts, well explained, collected, reviewed and provided with feedback for students (Butler, 1987). Moreover, parent- teacher meetings are needed to follow up students' performance.

Last but not least, the "get a diploma" mission does not lead to academic excellence. An internalized desire for learning is prerequisite if we wish learning to take place. Besides all these factors, there are many other factors that influence academic performance of students on various levels. Being a student, achieving success can become an impossible task if s/he get caught up by these factors and make no efforts to overcome.

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