**Original Research Article**

**Determinants of Students’ Academic Performance and its Correlation to Employment Opportunities in Bhutan: A Prospective Mixed Method Study.**

**Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to examine the determinants of academic performance of undergraduate students of the Royal University of Bhutan besides, it is also to understanding whether a better academic mark is associated with better employment opportunities for the young graduates.  To achieve the objectives, data were collected using google survey form from the 345 graduates across the country. The data collected from the survey were statistically analysed. Descriptive analysis and Cronbach’s Alpha were obtained. In addition, mean values were calculated in order to determine the factors of academic performance for undergraduate students in the country. Focal group discussion was also carried out to find the association of academic performance to employment opportunities for the undergraduate seeking employment opportunity. The result of this study indicates that from the three determinants, educational/institutional factor plays a greater role in enhancing academic performance of the undergraduates. Secondly, the employing agencies still place importance on the academic marks obtained however, there are a few core values that they look for in their employees.

*Key Words: Academic, Undergraduates, Family, Personal, Educational*

**Introduction**

Quality education is the cornerstone of socio-economic development and the enhancement of human capital. To enhance human capital, quality education is the prerequisite and should be promoted (Owings, Kaplan, and Pirim 2012; Tanzharikova 2012). Educational institutions are concerned about the quality education that is provided to their students, leading to an increase in their effort and commitment to improving student learning through formulating various policies and programs that help in promoting academic performance. Enhanced academic performance could indicate enhanced competence that students need for future career planning and career opportunities.

Internationally, extensive studies have been done and diverse literature on the predictors of academic performance in higher education are available. Earlier research was centered on developed countries, but recent times have seen an emphasis on developing countries and this has given rise to much controversy over the extent to which school and non-school factors influence academic achievement and the educational benefits of increasing expenditure on policy-controlled schooling variables. However, in Bhutan empirical findings on determinants of academic performance are not available.

Particularly, it is not known which factors have predictive power on the academic performance of undergraduate students in Bhutan. Furthermore, though hypothetically assumed that good academic performance can lead to better employment opportunities, this is not established in the Bhutanese setting. Bhutan’s educational context might be different from other countries; hence, what is empirically found in other countries may not stand true in the Bhutanese context. Due to the insufficiency of data on the factors affecting academic performance in the country’s higher education, the study is designed to examine the determinants of academic performance of undergraduate students the Royal University of Bhutan. Understanding whether a better academic mark is associated with better employment opportunities in civil service is necessary for both educational institutions and students.

**Research Questions and Objectives:**

The aim of the study is to determine the factors of academic performance and the association of academic performance to employment opportunities in civil service for undergraduate students in Bhutan.
**The specific objectives are:**
1. To ascertain determinants (personal factors, family factors, and educational institutional factors) of academic performance of undergraduate students in Bhutan.

2. To find whether academic performance (total aggregate marks) of the undergraduate student is associated with better employment opportunities in civil service for undergraduates in Bhutan.

**Research Questions:**

1. What are the determinants (personal factors, family factors, and education institution factors) of the academic performance of undergraduate students in Bhutan?

2. How is the academic performance (total aggregate marks) associated with better employment opportunities in civil service for undergraduates in Bhutan?

**Research Significant**

Determining the factors of academic performance of students in higher education is definitely important because any factor that influences academic performance is of concern to educators. Furthermore, understanding the association of academic performance and employment opportunities are of great interest to students, parents and educators. This study is expected to;

1. serve as a source of evidence for educators and educational policy makers to identify modifiable factors and address them in because the study had the personal, family, and school factors.
2. contribute to the addressing literature gap in Bhutan. Internationally, although multiple factors have been found to have a relationship with academic performance, it is important to explore the factors that contribute most to Bhutanese students. In addition, it could serve as a contribution to the comparison of national and international research findings.
3. serve as information source for students and their parents because the study incorporated student personal and family factors as the determinants of academic performance. It could help them identify the grey areas and improve on it to enhance their academic performance.
4. help tailor human resource policies with results of associations of academic performance and employment opportunities in civil service in Bhutan.

**Literature Review:**

Nowadays, a very high level of unemployment constitutes the normal structure of individuals’ work life in most of the countries. Organizational changes lead individuals to job insecurity (Sverke & Hellgren 2002) and thus to a natural decline in job performance and self-perceived employability.

The construct of employability is difficult to be defined. Fugate et al. (2004) suggest that employability is a psycho-social construct that represents characteristics of individuals that promote adaptive cognition, behavior and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface. Rothwell and Arnold (2007, 24) state that it is “the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires”, while in a study Rothwell et al. (2008) define employability in undergraduates as “the perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one’s qualification level” (p. 2), which refers to a particular context of application, like employability in undergraduates.

Beyond any doubt, education plays a pivotal role in the development and progress of a country. In a developing country education gain, even more importance. Better academic achievers procure higher satisfaction and poor achievers need special attention for the improvement of their quality of life (Shareef, Mohammad Abrar et al. 2015). There has been wide-ranging empirical literature on the predictors of academic performance at all levels from primary to tertiary education. As illuminated in literature, the predictors of academic performance have generally been classified as personal, family, and school factors. Some even argued that peers also affected student performance (Dancer et al 2015; Hill 2017).

Existing literature suggests that academic performance is influenced significantly by personal and family factors. Educational researchers have illustrated a number of personal factors that influence academic performance, including gender, age, class attendance (Andrietti 2014), academic self-efficacy (Feldman and Kubota 2015), high school grade (Danilowicz-Gösele et al. 2017), study effort (Andrietti and Velasco 2015), English ability (Sadeghi et al. 2013), etc. Previous studies have shown that level of parents’ education is an important predictor of children’s academic achievement (Lee & Croninger, 1994; Haveman & Wolfe, 1995). A study in Bhutan indicated that a mother’s education contributes to enhancing children’s academic achievement. On the one hand, mothers may, irrespective of their educational level, provide ‘content-free’ support to their children: showing interest, motivating them, etc (Selden K et al, 2020)

In addition, other external factors, including parental involvement, parental education, family socio-economic status (De Paola and Gioia 2017), school resources, and teaching skills (Muntaner-Mas et al. 2017) have a link with the academic performance of students in higher education as well. While there are anecdotes that obtaining good academic marks have better opportunities for seeking employment, it has no association with success in career and economic status of individuals.

Considering the effect of demographic, and environmental variables on the academic success rate, the academic success rate can be improved by planning to improve these factors (Bayat, B.,Salehiniya, H. 2019). Knowing the factors affecting the academic failure of students, who are future prospects and people in each country, can be programmed to help students succeed in acquiring scientific and specialized skills, and they can help with the educational process (Bakouei F et al. 2010). Studies also show that academic success is the issue that provides proper background for students' success during and after education (Karami MB. 2000).

However, there are no common findings on the impact of different factors on academic performance; the controversy can be attributed to different estimation methods, data measurements, data quality, or the context of each study. A study on individual settings and countries is necessary to help identify modifiable factors and address them to improve academic performance.

**Research Methodology:**

**Research design**: The study is a mixed method study: cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey to students and focus group discussion (FDG) with relevant officials of employment agencies. It was conducted between December 2021 to June 2022. Mixed method is used to get in-depth insight into the problems under study.

**Study population:**

All students graduating from the selected colleges of the RUB in 2021 will be eligible. Simple random sampling was done to identify students for enrolment in the study. The researchers obtained the contact address (email address and contact numbers) of the graduating students. The students without contact details or out of the country were excluded from the study. For FDG, Human Resource Officers and Directors/CEO of both public and private employment agencies were interviewed upon prior appointment.

**Sampling and sample size:**

Five colleges affiliated with the RUB were be randomly selected. The sampling frame consisted of list of all the students (name of the college, student name, age, sex, course, and aggregate academic marks obtained and contact numbers) of students graduated from the selected colleges were obtained from the respective colleges and RUB with approval. MS Excel based random selection technique was used to sample and select the students for recruitment in the study. Convenience sample technique was used to identify officials for FDG.

**Sample size:**

Sample size was calculated with the following formula (for known population size):

n = N\*X / (X + N – 1), where,

X = Zα/22 ­\*p\*(1-p) / MOE2,

and Zα/2 is the critical value of the Normal distribution at α/2 (e.g. for a confidence level of 95%, α is 0.05 and the critical value is 1.96), MOE is the margin of error, p is the sample proportion, and N is the population size.

The multivariate logistic regression was performed to identify the determinants of academic performance and each dependent variable of personal, family and institutional factors.

Considering an error margin of 5%, confidence interval of 95% and population size of approximately 5000 students, a sample size of 383 was be calculated. Considering, 10% non-participation, total sample size for the study was 427 participants. For FDG, 10 relevant officials of government and private recruitment agencies including MOLHR and RCSC were interviewed. The face-to-face focal group discussion was conducted and classical content analysis technique was used to analyse the content of the discussion.

**Data collection tool**

This study was a mixed mode cross-sectional study using the following tools:

1. Structured questionnaire for quantitative approach
2. Un-structured and open-ended questions for focus group discussion.

**Quantitative approach:**

Structured question-based study approach was utilised. The self-administered structured questionnaire was adopted from a study in Cambodia (Seng Sothan 2019).Reproducibility and validity of the data obtained by the questionnaire were verified in our study population through a pilot study (5% of sample size). The validated questionnaire were designed to gather information regarding two pre-determined factors (personal and family ones) that was hypothesized to be the determinants of academic performance. Questions on institutional and related environmental factors were added and included in the questionnaire. In an attempt to gather the necessary data in response to the given research objective, the survey questionnaire was designed into five components:

Part 1: Demographic profiles includes student ID number, college, course and academics marks obtained (verified with data obtained from colleges and RUB)

Part 2: Personal factors (age, gender, high school grade, English ability, employment, class attendance, study effort, and academic self-efficacy),

Part 3: Family factors (mother education, father education, family size, family SES, parental involvement, and household location).

Part 4: Institutional and environment factors (boarding/day scholar, location of college, number of faculties, availability of free internet, career counselling modules in the college and preliminary examination coaching to students)

Part 5: Employment of students (employment, duration required to seek of employment after graduation, type of employment)

**Qualitative approach:**

The FDG obtained the perspective of employing agencies on if academic marks influence employment opportunities for students and whether good academic performance of students relate to career growth of students.

**Data collection procedure:**

Self-administrated questionnaire was administered and responses were collected by the investigators. Aggregate academic marks obtained at the end of the course by the student was considered the proxy of academic achievement. Internet based survey platform (google form and Monkey survey tool) was used to collect responses. Survey link was forwarded to participants in their phone number as well as emails. Duplications of responses was cleaned prior to analysis. On non-response, questionnaire was sent to the participants two more times at an interval of two weeks. Consent was obtained prior to the data collection procedure. In-person or telephonic interviews was conducted for the FDG according to the preference and availability of the official.

**Data Analysis:**

Data was reviewed for accuracy and completeness prior to analysis. The datasets and individual data variable generated in google forms was validated before analysis. The statistical analysis was done using the IBM SPSS/STATA. For statistical analysis, confidence interval of 95% with p>0.05 is considered significant. The following analysis was conducted for the study aims, and results is presented in the form of tables, charts and graphs:

1. Descriptive analysis (frequencies, percentages, rages and percentiles) was performed for demographic data, personal factors, family factors and institutional factors.
2. The mean and descriptive analysis was performed to identify the determinants of academic performance and each dependent variable of personal, family and institutional factors.
3. Focal group discussion was used to ascertain the association of academic marks with employment opportunities for the undergraduates in the country.

**Data Presentation**

The results of the study is presented in text, tables and figures (bar graphs and pie charts). Descriptive result is presented as frequencies with the corresponding numbers and percentages for demographic profiles. Percentages and percentiles with statistical significances is performed to quantify participant’s responses. Focus group discussion is used to correlate to agree and disagree with quantitative findings. Important points identified during focus group discussion is used as quotes and discussion in the study. All inferences of the study is properly explained and link with the findings of the current literatures and presented in textual form.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

Demographic characteristics of sample

1. Gender

 There are 345 respondents among which 207 (60%) are female and 138 (40%) are male. Compare to female, the number of female respondents are more.

1. Scores in degree

About 60.4% of the total participants have scored between 61% to 70% in their degree. From the total participants, 13 (3.8%) have scored the lowest between 56% to 60%.



1. Employment sector



117 (34% ) of the respondents are employed in a government sector, 7 (1.9% ) respondents have opted farming as their career and almost 85 (24.5% ) of them are looking for a suitable job.

1. Year of Graduation



Little less than half (47.2%) of the respondents are the graduates of 2021 and oldest graduates (2018) who participated in the survey were around 32 (9.4%) .

1. Monthly Income of the respondents



24.5% of the respondent receive a monthly remuneration within the range of 10,000-15,000. However, the majority of them (30.2%) respondents receive 21,000-25,000 as their monthly salary. Around 7 (1.9%) respondents draw above 40, 000 as their monthly salary.

**Reliability Analysis:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl.No | Measure | Number of Items | Cronbach’s Alpha |
| 1 | Overall | 30 | 0.939 |
| 2 | Personal Factor | 10 | 0.899 |
| 3 | Family Factors | 10 | 0.855 |
| 4 | Educational Factors | 10 | 0.926 |

The test resulted a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.939 as shown in the above table which means that the data collected from 345 respondents were valid and reliable to be used for the analysis. The internal consistency reliability of each construct ranges from 0.855 to 0.962 and which is above the threshold value of 0.7 thus, this confirms internal consistency. The Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.7 is considered as acceptable, and the value above 0.8 is preferable or good (Walonick, 2003).

**Factor Wise Analysis**

1. **Personal Factor**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl.No** | **Item** | **SA** | **A** | **N** | **D** | **SD** |
| **1** | My education always remain as my first priority | **56.6** | **30.2** | **11.7** | **1.9** | **0** |
| **2** | I devote most of my time in exploring study related matter/experience | **20.8** | **54.8** | **18.9** | **5.7** | **0** |
| **3** | I pick friends who are good in studies and spent good deal of time in learning and practicing subject matters | **20.7** | **26.4** | **34** | **15.1** | **3.8** |
| **4** |  I had spent good hours reading books and articles for academic excellence | **15.1** | **34** | **35.8** | **11.3** | **3.8** |
| **5** | I am sure that my favourite subjects could potentially build my future | **26.4** | **35.8** | **24.5** | **13.2** | **1.9** |
| **6** | I could identify my interest area and pave my way for my future career | **18.9** | **47.2** | **26.4** | **7.5** | **1.8** |
| **7** | My future career always remained at the back of my mind during my educational journey. | **32.1** | **30.2** | **26.4** | **11.3** | **0** |
| **8** | I explored ideas on areas of my career interest besides my studies. | **24.5** | **37.7** | **28.3** | **9.5** | **0** |
| **9** | My friends have same interest area as mine, both hobbies and ambitions | **7.5** | **26.4** | **34** | **30.2** | **1.9** |
| **10** | Books and articles in the field of my future career often interested me during my school/college days | **17** | **41.5** | **32.1** | **9.4** | **0** |
| **Total** |  | **23.97** | **36.41** | **27.17** | **11.5** | **0.95** |
|  **Agreement = 60.38%** |  **Disagreement = 16.45%** |

*From the 345 respondents, 60.38% of them feel that personal factor plays a greater role in their academic performance however, 16.45% disagree to the same.*

1. **Family Factor**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl.No** | **Item** | **SA** | **A** | **N** | **D** | **SD** |
| **1** | My parents supported my education for better career opportunity in the future. | **71.7** | **18.9** | **7.5** | **1.9** | **0** |
| **2** | We discuss career and carrier plans among family members. | **43.4** | **35.8** | **11.3** | **9.5** | **0** |
| **3** | My parents are concerned about my career and future. | **73.6** | **18.9** | **7.5** | **0** | **0** |
| **4** | My parents supported my educational journey and guide choices (subjects/streams/major selection in college education) | **54.7** | **32.1** | **7.5** | **3.8** | **1.9** |
| **5** | My parents have fair knowledge about job market and future career opportunities. | **28.3** | **26.4** | **30.2** | **15.1** | **0** |
| **6** | My parents provided sufficient support to achieve academic excellence. | **64.2** | **24.5** | **7.5** | **1.9** | **1.9** |
| **7** | My parents frequently checked test scores and discussed study related matters with me. | **22.6** | **37.7** | **24.5** | **13.3** | **1.9** |
| **8** |  My parents timely provided me all the study related materials (books, stationary and others), whenever required. | **60.4** | **18.9** | **11.3** | **9.4** | **0** |
| **9** | My parents often contacted teacher to inquire about my academic performance. | **17** | **24.5** | **30.4** | **20.8** | **7.3** |
| **10** | My parents often take interest to sit and listen to my talks on school/college related matters. | **39.6** | **35.8** | **13.3** | **9.4** | **1.9** |
| **Total** | **47.55** | **27.35** | **15.07** | **8.49** | **1.49** |
|  **Agreement = 74.9%** | **Disagreement =9.98%** |

*Of the total, 74.9% of the respondents are of the opinion that their family and lifestyle/environment impact their academic performance.*

1. **Educational Factor**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl.No** | **Item** | **SA** | **A** | **N** | **D** | **SD** |
| **1** | My school/institute’s culture and environment determine my academic performance. | **35.8** | **54.7** | **7.6** | **1.9** | **0** |
| **2** | My teachers had direct impact in my academic performance. | **52.8** | **39.6** | **7.6** | **0** | **0** |
| **3** | My schools and institutes gave me enough hands on practices to make my learning firm and strong. | **34** | **54.7** | **9.4** | **1.9** | **0** |
| **4** | My teachers used a variety of methods/styles to improve my academic performance. | **39.6** | **45.3** | **11.3** | **3.8** | **0** |
| **5** | Fair assessment system and smooth feedback mechanism in my schools helped me in my academic pursuit. | **35.8** | **41.5** | **18.9** | **3.8** | **0** |
| **6** | Interest in career in me is built by my institute’s environment and culture. | **20.8** | **50.9** | **20.8** | **5.7** | **1.9** |
| **7** | Teachers often shared ideas on career and career prospects during my educational journey.  | **34** | **50.9** | **15.1** | **0** | **0** |
| **8** | I acquire enough hands on practices to orient me on my future career. | **28.3** | **43.4** | **22.6** | **5.7** | **0** |
| **9** | Teaching methods and style of my teachers often inspired me to dream of my future career. | **28.3** | **49.1** | **15.1** | **7.5** | **0** |
| **10** | Fair assessment system and smooth feedback mechanism in my schools helped me in my academic pursuit. | **34** | **41.5** | **20.8** | **3.7** | **0** |
| **Total** |  | **34.34** | **47.15** | **14.92** | **3.4** | **0.19** |
|  **Agreement = 81.49%** | **Disagreement =3.59%** |

*81.49% of the respondents agree that educational factor impacts their academic performance 18.51% of the respondents do not agree on the same.*

**Findings**

From the three dimensions, educational factor receives the highest agreement (81.49%) and personal factor receives the lowest 60.34% agreement. Majority of our respondent’s feel that their academic journey is directly and more often impacted of the educational/institutional factors. Moreover, the respondents (92.5%) feel that their teachers have direct impact in their academic performance. However, just (71.5%) of the respondents feel that they acquire enough hands on practices to orient them on their future career. The educational institutes doesn’t provide enough practical/hands-on practices which is directly related to their future career.

From the ten items in the family factor, the highest rated item is “my parents are concerned about my career and future ‘which receives (92.5%) agreement. On the contrary, 41.5% of the respondents feel that their parents often contact teacher to inquire about their academic performance. From the personal dimension which is rated the lowest from the three (60.38%), the lowest agreement is received for the item is “my friends have same interest area as mine, both hobbies and ambitions” and highest (86.6%) by the item, “my education always remain as my first priority”.

Focal group discussion was conducted to obtain the perspective of employing agencies to know if the academic marks influence employment opportunities for students. It was confirmed for the discussion that good academic performance of students helps in obtaining a good career for themselves however, their career growth depends entirely on their performance and output. “Quality performance and impressive output ascertains their career progression”, said one official from Bhutan National Bank Limited. Some of the international agencies also shared that beside their academic performance; the IQ level, communication skills, sense of respect for time and integrity are some of the virtues they look for in their employees. One of the senior official from UNDP said that, “Graduates today carry good marks but they lack commitment which we are often not able to judge during the interview”. Thus, academic mark is vital however, there are other qualities that the employer looks for in their employees.

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that educational/institutional factor has the highest impact on the academic performance of the young graduates. The graduates feels that their academic performance is least affected by the personal factors. Thus, from the three determinants (personal factors, family factors, and educational institutional factors), educational/institutional factor determines the academic performance of undergraduate students in Bhutan.

**Recommendation**

1. The RUB colleges must provide proper career education classes to the undergraduates. They must ensure that students are provided hand-on practices in their classes.
2. The students must be oriented on the concepts independent learning and self-education. Beside the effort of institution, students at individual level must be encouraged to uplift their academic rigor.
3. The students must be made aware by the colleges that besides the academic marks, the employing agencies look into core values such as integrity and commitment in their work. These values must be integrated in curriculum and developed at educational institutes.

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