

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL SKILLS ON ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

¹DR. RANI GUL, ²DR. SADIA BATOOL, ³DR. SHAISTA IRSHAD KHAN, ⁴MISS. FAKHRA JABEEN

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of Malakand, Chakdara, Pakistan
ranigul@uom.edu.pk

²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Karakoram University, Gilgit Diamer Campus, Pakistan

³Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan
dr.shaistakhan@awkum.edu.pk

⁴Mphil Scholar, Department of Education, University of Haripur, Pakistan

Abstract: The purpose of the study was to find out the level of students' social skills and academic competencies among undergraduate students at the department of Law and Journalism at BUIITEMS, Quetta, Pakistan. Using two different questionnaires, data on the questionnaires were collected from a sample of 100 students. t-test and correlation tests results found that the perceptions of the students in terms of their social skills and academic competencies were the same, and the correlation values also predicted that social skills have a positive and significant effect on students' academic competencies. The study suggested providing faculty and staff professional development to ensure comprehensive training of undergraduate students with educational quality, which allow the student to be a successful person in every aspect. The study also suggested that educational institutions should provide timely and adequate attention to give necessary importance to the social skills of students, provide them lectures, seminars, suitable environments and facilities for indoor and outdoor physical activities, and increase field trips.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social skills refer to the ability to communicate, interact, and connect with others in a way that is positive and effective. Pachauri & Yadav (2014) defined social skills as personality behaviors, social politeness, fluency in a language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism to variable degrees. It involves using verbal and nonverbal communication, listening, and understanding social cues to build and maintain relationships with others. In recent years, social skills have become increasingly important to academic skills and are strongly associated with the success of life and engagement (Gibb, 2014), which has motivated many researchers' interest in social skills. Research has emphasized that the major difficulties in students' learning can be resolved only if their social skills are improved (Schwinger, 2005). Educational leaders, teachers, school analysts, social workers and school psychologists have argued that students are found academically under-performing because they lack proper social skills because they mostly remain careless and unprepared during instructional periods, have violent behaviour toward class fellows and teachers, incapability to participate cooperative learning and disobedient behaviour in the classroom, which affected their academic skills studying skills, problem-solving skills, critical and decision making skills, mastery and performance skills, and task management skills (Ahmad, Gul, & Kashif, 2022; Gul & Khilji, 2023; Salameh et al., 2022)

Social skills tend to enhance personal development, better understanding, productivity, employability and career success. It is observed that in Pakistan especially KPK most university students lack social skills and basic English academic competencies. Thus, the study was conducted to investigate the effect of social skills on academic competencies among undergraduate students.



Academic skills refer to a set of abilities that students need to be successful in their academic pursuits. These skills include reading, writing, critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, note-taking, and study skills (Ayub et al., 2021; Batool et al., 2022; Gul, Ayub, et al., 2021)

Academic skills are important for students for several reasons. First, these skills enable students to effectively learn and understand new material. Students who possess strong academic skills are better able to read and comprehend textbooks, take effective notes during lectures, and engage in critical thinking to analyze and synthesize information. Second, academic skills are essential for success in academic assessments, such as tests, exams, and essays. Students who possess strong academic skills are better able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the material, which can lead to higher grades and academic achievement (Gul, Kanwal, et al., 2020; Gul & Rafique, 2017). Third, academic skills are transferable to many other areas of life. The ability to think critically, solve problems, manage time, and communicate effectively are important skills that are valued in many different careers and contexts.

In an investigation conducted by Loannis and Efrosini (2008) about intelligent female students in talent, non-profit, and ordinary universities using a list of students' social skills, they found that the social skills of talented students were weaker than those of students in the non-profit and ordinary university. In addition, other studies (Ahmad, Gul, & Imtiaz, 2022; Ali et al., 2021; Batool et al., 2022; Gul, Khan, et al., 2020) compared the psychological health and social compatibility of intelligent female students in three educational situations, talent, non-profit, and ordinary university, in both secondary and high university. The results of this investigation indicated that the intelligent female students had no meaningful difference in the variables of psychological health and social compatibility in exceptional talent, non-profit, and ordinary university (Ayub et al., 2021; Gul & Reba, 2017; Saleem et al., 2021; Sohail et al., 2018). In contrast, some researchers have reported that there is a considerable difference between intelligent students who are being educated in university, especially intelligent students who are educated in university, in terms of psychological health and social compatibility. The special university is more useful for intelligent students and has desirable consequences for them (Batool et al., 2021; Gul, Kanwal, et al., 2020; Gul et al., 2023; Muhammad Tufail et al., 2022; Salameh et al., 2022). The previous studies are mostly on cultural social skills, which usually deal with each concept separately or address them with other subjects (Ekici, 2017; Şenol, 2015; Kalafat, 2006; Mercan, 2016; Şahin & Gürbüz, 2012). However, no study examines the concepts of social skills and their reflection in education at the same time.

Studies have identified several factors which influence student retention in higher education, including students' socio-demographic characteristics, choice of studies, cognitive capacity, motivation, personal situation, and academic and social integration (Bukhari et al., 2021; Gul & Khilji, 2021) (Gul, Tahir, & Batool, 2021). Similarly, research has shown that many of the students who entered into undergraduate programs are not aware of what is expected of them at university and that they are often academically unprepared (Gul, Tahir, & Ishfaq, 2021; Gul, Zakir, et al., 2021; Said et al., 2021). Students' preparedness is particularly relevant to academic competencies, which they are supposed to already possess when entering university (Barrie, 2007; Taylor & Bedford, 2004).

The presented study is significant in many respects. Firstly, the findings may enable higher education institutions to understand students' perceptions of guidance and self-assessed strengths and areas for improvement, which can help them meet their student's needs and provide necessary support services. Secondly, the findings can help to shed light on how social skills and academic competencies are related. This can help educators to better understand how to support students in developing the social and emotional skills they need to succeed academically (Ahmad, Gul, & Zeb, 2022; Rani Gul et al., 2022; Gul, Ayub, et al., 2021). Thirdly the findings may help to identify effective interventions that can be used to support students in developing their social skills and



academic competencies. This can include programs and initiatives that are designed to improve social and emotional learning, as well as teacher training and professional development to help educators support students in these areas ((Ahmad & Gul, 2021; Gul, Ayub, et al., 2021; Gul, Muhammad, et al., 2021). Lastly, by understanding the relationship between social skills and academic competencies, and identifying effective interventions to support students, research can help to improve student outcomes. Students who possess strong social skills are more likely to succeed academically and in their future careers, and investing in the development of these skills can lead to positive outcomes for individuals and society.

Research Question

1. To what extent the perceptions of the students regarding their social skills are different among semesters 3rd and semester 7th?
2. To what extent do the social skills of the students affect their academic competencies?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and sampling procedure

The research design was quantitative and the method adopted for research was survey design in which different questionnaires were used for data collection. All the students of semester 3rd and semester 7th, Department of Law and Journalism and Department of Education, at the university of BUITEMS, Pakistan constituted the population of the study. The researcher selected 100 students randomly. 48 from semester 3rd and 52 from semester 7th. Among these students, 50 were male and 50 were female from semester 3rd and semester 7th.

Research Instrument

The research instruments used in the study were questionnaires. Questionnaire as an instrument helps in collecting information more rapidly than any other means. In addition, the participants of the study were undergraduate students who could easily read and respond to the statements given in the English language in the questionnaire. Two different questionnaires were used to collect data from semester 3rd and semester 7th. The first questionnaire was used to the perceptions of the students regarding their social skills. The second questionnaire of ten academic competencies was used to get data about basic English competencies from semester 3rd and semester 7th.

The research instrument was prepared in consultation with the existing literature and the same was discussed with another expert in the field. After making the necessary changes suggested by experts and students after piloting. The researcher used the Cronbach alpha method to measure the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach alpha was found 0.7 which is considered significant.

Data Collection and Analysis

With the prior consent of availability and volunteer participation, the questionnaires were personally administered to students and they were given enough time to fill out the questionnaires. After data collection, the data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, independent sample t-test, and correlation).

3. RESULTS

Demographic information

Participants were questioned to mark their gender on the questionnaire, and the output of the participants' responses was analyzed by frequency distribution. The analysis results are presented in table 1.



Table 1: Frequency Distribution gender-wise and semester wise

		Male	Female	3 rd Sems	7 th Sems
Valid	Frequency	50	50	48	52
	Percent	50.0	50.0	48.0	52.0
	Total	100		100	

50(50 %) students reported their gender male while female students were 50(50%). While 48(48%) students were 3rd semester while 52(52%) students were 7th semester and total students were 100 (100%) as shown in the table.

Research question 1: To what's extent the perceptions of the students regarding their social skills are different among semester 3rd and semester 7th students?

An independent-sample t-test (alpha level of .05), was used to determine the difference between semester 3rd and 7th semesters. The test results are shown in table-2.

Table 2: independent-samples t-test for social skills

	t	Sig. (2-t)	95% C.I of the Difference	
			Lower	Upper
Statements for social skills				
I accept and fulfil any task with full confidence and enthusiasm	-.017	.98	-.37	.36
I keep good communication interaction with my classmates.	.449	.65	-.25	.40
I respond coolly to my classmates inside and outside the classroom.	-.268	.79	-.46	.35
I control my temper in conflict situations with classmates.	.562	.57	-.26	.46
I prefer listening to others except talking by myself	1.82	.07	-.72	.034
I asked people for help when required	.915	.36	-1.3	3.53
I keep a good relationship with teachers	1.05	.29	-.58	.18
I volunteer to help peers with classroom tasks.	.527	.60	-.26	.44

For the statement SS-1, the "t" value in the table is $t = -.017$, with 48 degrees of freedom (df), and the "p" value is .986. Since $p > .05$, it was concluded that the semester 3rd and semester 7th students were not significantly different in their levels of social skill-1. For SS-2, SS-4, SS-5 and SS-6, the "t" value in the table ($t = .449$, $p = .074$), ($t = .629$, $p = .577$) and ($t = .915$, $p = .365$). Since $p > .05$, therefore, no significant difference in semester 3rd and semester 7th students' perceptions of these social skills. On the contrary, for social skills 3, it was seen that the observed "t" value in the table was ($t = -.268$) with a pdf of 48, and the "p" value was .791. As $p > .05$, it was concluded that the semester 3rd and semester 7th students are the same significantly in their levels of social skills 3.

For the other social skills statements like SS-7, SS-8, SS-9, and SS-10, the "t" value in the table was ($t = -1.054$ with $p = .297$), ($t = .449$ with $p = .600$) ($t = -1.83$ and $p = .073$), and ($t = .116$ and $p = .908$). As $p > .05$, therefore, semester 3rd and semester 7th students were not significantly different in these levels of social skills.

Research question 2. To what extent do the social skills of the students affect their academic competencies?



To test, the Pearson r correlation coefficient was used to assess the correlation between social skills and academic competencies among undergraduate students. the results are presented in table-3

Table 3: Social skills and academic competencies Correlations

SS statements		ACQ1	ACQ2	ACQ3	ACQ4	ACQ5	ACQ6	ACQ7	ACQ8	ACQ9	ACQ10
SS1	P. Correlation	.169	.218	-.023	.182	.445**	.454**	.052	.113	.075	.340*
SS2	P. Correlation	.115	-.125	-.071	-.092	-.001	-.199	.134	-.157	.065	.052
SS3	P. Correlation	.174	.011	.135	-.123	-.107	.076	.105	-.066	-.264	-.048
SS4	P. Correlation	-.003	-.119	-.172	-.007	.071	.227	.185	-.094	-.250	.121
SS5	P. Correlation	-.017	.160	-.120	-.010	.206	.153	.137	-.102	.061	.235
SS6	P. Correlation	-.233	.062	-.094	-.022	.056	-.071	.203	.136	-.092	-.066
SS7	P. Correlation	.316*	.254	.363**	.095	.061	-.073	-.325*	.165	.138	.242
SS8	P. Correlation	.011	-.046	-.050	-.015	.127	.025	.044	.084	.136	.146
SS9	P. Correlation	.218	-.004	-.107	.142	.088	.315*	.147	.089	-.073	.238
SS10	P. Correlation	-.303*	-.219	-.054	-.248	-.253	-.372**	-.100	-.070	-.143	-.241

The SS-1 statement has shown a significantly high correlation with ACQ6 with $r = .445$), ACQ5 with $r = .445$, ACQ10 with $r = .340$, and ACQ2 with $r = .218$ has shown an average correlation while ACQ3 with $r = -.023$, ACQ9 with $r = .075$, ACQ7 with $r = .052$, ACQ8 with $r = .113$ and ACQ1 with $r = .169$ significant but low correlation was found. The SS-2 has shown significantly high correlation with ACQ7 with $r = .134$, ACQ1 with $r = .115$ and ACQ9 with $r = .065$, ACQ10 with $r = .052$ is average correlation while ACQ5 with $r = -.001$, ACQ3 with $r = -.07$, ACQ2 with $r = -.125$, ACQ4 with $r = -.092$, ACQ6 with $r = -.19$, ACQ8 with $r = -.157$ is low correlation. The SS-3 has shown a significantly high correlation with ACQ1 with $r = .174$, ACQ3 with $r = .135$, ACQ7 with $r = .105$, and ACQ5 with $r = -.107$, ACQ4 with $r = -.123$, ACQ8 with $r = -.066$, ACQ9 with $r = -.264$, ACQ10 with $r = -.048$ is low correlation. The SS-4, has shown significantly high correlation with ACQ6 with $r = .227$, ACQ7 with $r = .185$ while with ACQ3 with $r = -.17$, ACQ2 with $r = -.119$, ACQ4 with $r = -.007$, ACQ1 with $r = -.003$ is low correlation.

The SS-5 has shown a significantly high correlation with ACQ10 with $r = -.235$, ACQ5 with $r = -.206$ while ACQ2 with $r = .160$, ACQ6 with $r = .153$, ACQ7 with $r = .137$ is average and the ACQ1 with $r = -.017$, ACQ4 with $r = -.010$ is a low correlation. The SS-6, has shown significantly high correlation with ACQ7 with $r = .206$, ACQ8 with $r = .136$, while the ACQ5 with $r = .056$ and ACQ2 with $r = .062$ is average correlation and ACQ1 with $r = -.233$, ACQ3 with $r = -.094$, ACQ4 with $r = -.022$, ACQ6 with $r = -.071$, ACQ9 with $r = -.092$, ACQ10 with $r = -.066$ is low correlation. The SS-7, has shown significantly high correlation with ACQ3 with $r = .363$, ACQ1 with $r = .316$, while ACQ2 with $r = .254$, ACQ10 with $r = .242$, while the ACQ9 with $r = .138$, ACQ8 with $r = .165$, is average correlation and while ACQ7 with $r = -.325$, ACQ6 with $r = -.073$, ACQ5 with $r = .061$ is low correlation. The SS-8, has shown significantly high correlation with ACQ9 with $r = .136$, ACQ10 with $r = .146$, ACQ5 with $r = .127$, while the ACQ7 with $r = .084$, and while the ACQ3 with $r = -.050$, ACQ2 with $r = -.046$, ACQ4 with $r = -.015$, ACQ1 with $r = .011$ is low correlation. The SS-9 has shown a significantly high correlation with ACQ6, ACQ10, and ACQ1, while the ACQ7, and ACQ5 have shown with average correlation. while ACQ3, ACQ2, ACQ9, ACQ2 is low correlation. The SS-10 has shown a significantly low correlation with all academic competencies.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the study was to find out the effect of social skills on academic competencies among undergraduate students. A quantitative research design was adopted to investigate the problem. The findings of the research showed that all social skills statements of semester 3rd and semester 7th have no significant differences in students' perceptions. This way, we can coincide with (Brown, Johnson, Bender & Roberts, 2008), who states that, by improving social skills and



mental health, students have optimal performance in educational activities. A student having good social skills can perform better in academic achievement in university, behave positively and establish and maintain relationships with others effectively. It was found that in the social skills and academic competencies correlations, some statement was high, some with average and some were with low correlation. But the statement “I try to keep patience when dealing with special students in the classroom” has shown a significantly low correlation with all academic competencies. The enabling function of social skills on academic competencies (Rani Gul et al., 2022; Rani Gul et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022) could be partially mediated by the child’s cognitive competencies. Although the correlation between the variables is weak, the amount of data was very consistent with acceptable confidence, thus strongly supporting the correlation was found.

Based on the findings it is concluded that they should be considered bio-psycho-social entities, so if they do not develop social skills, they cannot perform well in the higher education context, so there is mistrust, insecurity, emotional and social imbalances among others, which lead to not developing their educable skills of learning to learn, knowing how to do and knowing how to be, as to ensure comprehensive training with educational quality, which allow the student to be a successful person in every aspect. The study suggested that educational institutions should provide timely and adequate attention to give necessary importance to the social skills of students, provide them lectures, seminars, suitable environment and facilities for indoor and outdoor physical activities, and increase field trips.

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