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Academic Performance and Life Satisfaction among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract:

The interactive effects of academic achievement and life satisfaction among students is an area widely researched, however literature available is not sufficient to make generalized conclusions and points out the need for further exploration. This study therefore examined the relationship between academic performance and life satisfaction among undergraduate students of a private college in Bangalore. Cross sectional survey design was adopted and based on convenient sampling, data was collected from 102 students. Life satisfaction was assessed using Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale and academic performance was taken as the percentage scored in previous examination. Data analyzed using Pearson's correlation showed a weak positive correlation of 0.26 between life satisfaction and academic performance which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level. The result suggests that life satisfaction enhances academic achievement to some extent and vice versa, indicating the need to further explore contexts that lead to life satisfaction and thereby create effective learning environment.

Keywords: Life satisfaction, academic performance, students.

1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is the way people view their lives and how they foresee their future. It depicts an individual's well-being and is often measured in terms of self-concept, mood, achieved goals, satisfaction with relationships and self-perceived ability to cope with daily life. Life satisfaction is influenced by financial status, education, life experiences, place of residence, and many such aspects of life (Diener et al. 1996). A lot of research has been done in the area of subjective well-being, happiness and life satisfaction which are all related concepts. One area of focus has been life satisfaction among adolescents.

The youth of today live in a challenging world which puts them under immense pressure to prove their abilities in order to sell themselves in the career domains, achieve degrees and to earn a respectable position in society. The question we need to ask here is, have they compromised on happiness in this race for achievement, is the present generation really satisfied with their lives? Does better performance improve life satisfaction? Is there a connection between the two?

According to a study published in June 2012 by a medical journal *Lancet*, suicide death rates are generally greater in the more developed four southern states of India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala) which have nearly a ten times higher suicide rate than some of the less developed northern states. The higher rates of suicide in the more developed and educated communities of India may be attributed to "the greater likelihood of disappointments when aspirations that define success and happiness are distorted or unmet by the reality faced by young people in a rapidly changing society." (Daigle, K., 2012). The education system in India is more job-oriented than life. Pressure to perform well to reach higher academic qualifications is one of the major reasons for suicide among the youth. Moreover, education has become very competitive. The pressure to excel is very high, given the tough admission procedures in top educational institutions as well as the competitive job market. Parents today are more worried about the academic performance that push their children up as per their ambitions rather than being concerned about the ability and happiness of their children. As a result, the adolescent may consciously or unconsciously relate better academic performance with life satisfaction.

Researchers have examined the relationship between student's academic achievement and life satisfaction, and so far, studies focusing on this relationship have shown conflicting results. Whereas earlier research did not consistently find correlations, more recent studies have reported a positive relationship between adolescents' academic achievement and life satisfaction. In a number of cross-sectional studies academic achievement was not related to students' LS scores and no differences in levels of global LS between students with different achievement levels (e.g. Students at risk for school failure and normally achieving students) were found (Huebner, E, 1991., Huebner, E., & Alderman, G. 1993., Suldo, S., et al., 2006). In contrast, other studies have suggested a moderate correlation ($r = 0.32$) between academic achievement and adolescents' global life satisfaction in samples of $N = 485$ (Gilman, R., & Huebner, E. 2006), and $N = 349$ adolescents (Suldo, S.M., and Shaffer, E.J. 2008). A Study done among Dutch students showed that life satisfaction correlated significantly ($r = 0.12$) with the grade point averages in a sample of $N = 1090$ (Verkuyten. M and Thijs. J., 2002). Data from a

Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), found strong correlations between the high school students of different nations' average life satisfaction scores and achievement test scores. The highest correlation to life satisfaction being reading achievement scores ($r = 0.63$) (Kirkcaldy, B., et. al 2004). A study conducted to find out the significant difference between high and low need for cognition on life satisfaction of 80 P.G. students studying in the departments of social science at Dharwad University showed that the students with high need for cognition have significantly high life satisfaction (Huli, P., & Aminbhavi, D. 2014). Interactive Effect of Academic Procrastination and Academic Performance on Life Satisfaction were explored among 167 students in Tamil Nadu. The results found a significant relationship between performance and life satisfaction but no interactive effect was found between Procrastination, performance and life satisfaction (Savithri, J. 2014).

Few studies have also looked at variables that have a moderating effect on the relationship between life satisfaction and academic performance. A German study investigated the role of parents' education as a potential moderator between adolescents' academic achievement and LS. A sample of high school students ($N=411$) reported parents' educational attainment, as an indicator of family socio-economic status, and students' academic achievement was operationalized by average in five subjects. The association between academic achievement and LS was only found in the group of students whose mothers had achieved the same or a higher education as their own children (Crede, J., et al., 2015). At the University of Rijeka, Croatia an exploratory study investigated the role of personality traits and students' academic and social college adjustment to their overall life satisfaction and depression. Sample of 492 freshmen completed a battery of measures. The results show that poor academic adjustment can contribute to depression in all students, but good academic adjustment predicts life satisfaction only in females. It seems that they place more stress on academic achievements in their assessment of life satisfaction, while male students rely more on other things, such as their social functioning (Azic, S.S., et al., 2010).

Recent studies done to correlate academic performance and life satisfaction show overall positive tendencies. This pattern is however quite different in few of the earlier studies, which emphasizes the fact that today's competitive generation considers academic excellence as a need to attain satisfaction in life. Can this trend be the same among students in metropolitan cities of developing countries like India? Literature available is not sufficient to make generalized conclusions and therefore points out the need for further research in this direction. The researcher therefore aims to study the relationship between academic performance and life satisfaction among students and the association of life satisfaction with selected baseline variables. It was hypothesized that academic performance and life satisfaction will be correlated and there will be association of life satisfaction with selected baseline variables at 0.05 level of significance.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using cross sectional survey design at a private degree college, which is located in Bangalore. The college offers pre-university and under graduate courses in science, commerce and arts. After seeking ethical clearance and formal permission from the authorities of the college, written informed consent was taken from all under-graduate students who were available at the time of study. Based on convenient sampling 102 students participated in the study. Data was collected using self-reported questionnaires which consisted of demographic details, CRAFFT questionnaire for screening substance use and Multidimensional student life satisfaction scale. Academic performance was taken as the percentage scored in previous exam, which was obtained along with attendance from respective class teachers.

3. Results

SI No.	Socio-demographic variable	f(%)
1)	Age	
a.	< 18	0 (0.00)
b.	18-20	26 (02.5)
c.	>20	76 (74.50)
2)	Gender	
a.	Male	59 (57.84)
b.	Female	43 (42.15)
3)	Religion	
a.	Hindu	60 (58.82)
b.	Muslim	33 (32.35)
c.	Christian	7 (06.86)
d.	Buddhist	2 (01.96)
4)	Type of family	
a.	Nuclear	69 (67.64)
b.	Joint	07(6.86)
c.	Extended	26(25.49)
5)	Family income	
a.	< 5000	07 (06.86)
b.	5000-10000	38(37.25)
c.	>10000	57(55.88)

6)	Relationship between parents	
a.	Satisfactory	52(50.98)
b.	Unsatisfactory	41(40.19)
c.	Divorced	03(02.94)
d.	Separated	01(00.98)
e.	Single parent	00(0.00)
f.	Widow/widower	04(03.92)
g.	Orphan/living with guardian	01(00.98)

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of students according to age, gender, religion, type of family, relationship with parents and family income. (N=102)

The above table shows that majority of the students (74.5%) are above 20 yrs of age and around 58% of them are males. Most of the students (58.8%) are Hindus and belong to nuclear families with an income greater than 10,000 Rs/ month. Out of the 102 students around 50% have reported satisfactory relationship between parents.

Sl No.	Socio-demographic variable	f(%)
1)	Birth order	
a.	Eldest	59(57.84)
b.	Middle	32 (31.33)
c.	Youngest	06 (5.88)
d.	Only child	05(4.90)
2)	Educational status of father	
a.	Illiterate	16(15.68)
b.	Primary education	10(9.8)
c.	Secondary education	47(46.07)
d.	Pre university	19(18.6)
e.	Graduate	08(7.84)
f.	Post graduate	02(1.96)
3)	Educational status of mother	
a.	Illiterate	29(28.43)
b.	Primary education	31(30.39)
c.	Secondary education	20(19.60)
d.	Pre university	18(17.64)
e.	Graduate	04(3.92)
f..	Post graduate	00(0.00)
4)	Occupational status of father	
a.	Unemployed	09(8.82)
b.	Self employed	52(50.98)
c.	Government employee	05(4.90)
d.	Private company	36(35.29)
5)	Occupational status of mother	
a.	Unemployed	63(61.76)
b.	Self employed	18(17.64)
c.	Government employee	02(1.96)
d.	Private company	19(18.62)
6)	Medium of instruction in school	
a.	mother tongue	79(77.4)
b.	regional language	12(11.76)
c.	English	11(10.78)
7)	Part time job	
a.	Yes	58(56.86)
b.	No	44(43.13)

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of students according to birth order, number of siblings, educational and occupational status of parents, medium of instruction in school and part time job.(N=102)

It is evident from table 1b that majority (57.84%) of the students are oldest in the family and most have one or more siblings. Educational status of parents reveals that only 15.6% of fathers are illiterate when compared to 28.4% of illiteracy among mothers. Majority (61.7%) of mothers are unemployed whereas only 8.8% of fathers do not have an occupation. Most of the students (77.4%) have undergone schooling in their mother tongue and 56.86% of them have a part time job.

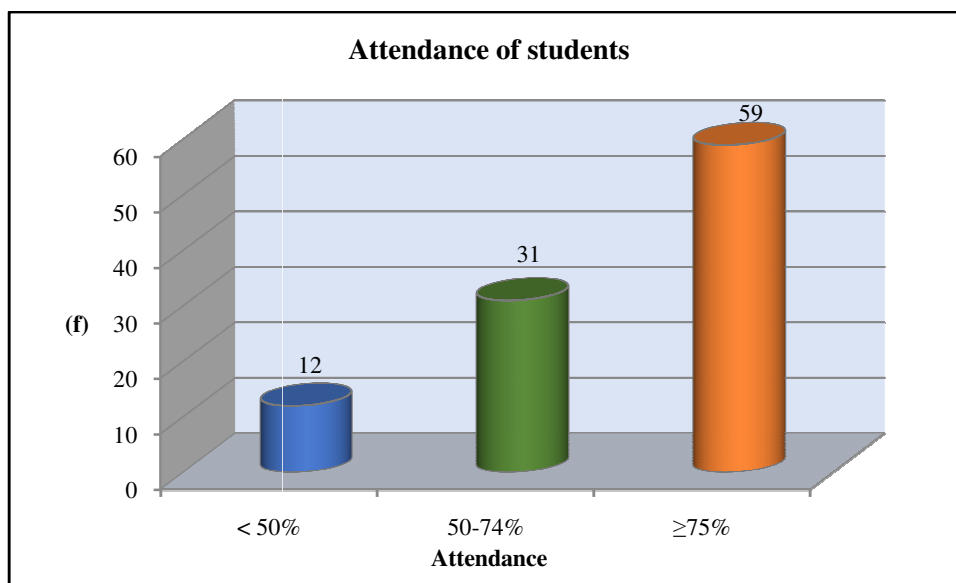


Figure 1: Attendance of students.

The above figure shows that majority of the students have ≥ 75 % attendance.

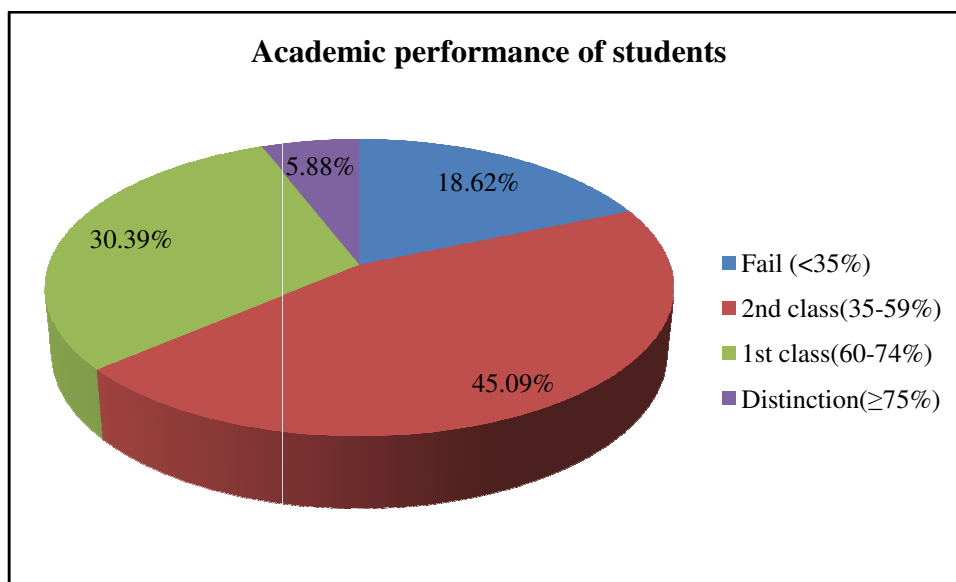


Figure 2: Academic performance of students.

The above figure shows that majority of the students fall into the category of 1st or 2nd class.

Sl No	Variable	Min score		Max score		Mean	SD
1.	Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale Score(MSLSS)	40		240		119.42	4.09
2.	Domain scores *	Min score	Converted Min score	Max score	Converted max score	Mean	SD
a.	Family	7	1	42	6	2.91	0.82
b.	Friends	9	1	54	6	3.76	1.60
c.	School	8	1	48	6	3.31	0.79
d.	Living environment	9	1	54	6	1.90	0.81
e.	Self	7	1	42	6	2.82	1.41

Table 3: Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) scores and individual domain scores of students. N=102

Table 2b reveals that mean Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) Score is 119.42 ± 4.09 . Students have highest satisfaction scores in the domain of friends with a mean of 3.76 ± 1.60 , this is followed by school and family with scores of 3.31 ± 0.79 and 2.91 ± 0.82 respectively. The least satisfaction is experienced in the domain of living environment with a mean score of 1.90 ± 0.81 .
* The domain scores are transformed for the purpose of comparison.

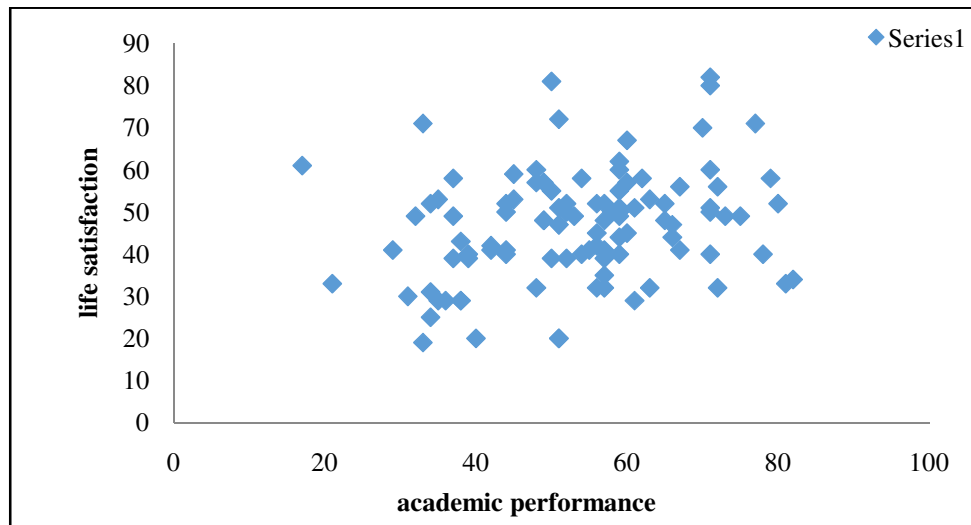


Figure 3: scatter plot of correlation between life satisfaction and academic achievement.

Variable	Academic achievement	
	r	p
Life satisfaction	0.264	0.003S

Table 4: Correlation matrix between academic achievement and life satisfaction of students.

(N=102)

S= significant at <0.05 level

It is evident from the above matrix that there is a very weak positive correlation between life satisfaction and academic performance of students and this correlation is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

4. Discussion

4.1. Life Satisfaction of Students

In the present study, life satisfaction was assessed using Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) and a mean score of 119.42 ± 4.09 was obtained. Students have highest satisfaction scores in the domain of friends with a mean of 3.76 ± 1.60 this is followed by school and family with scores of 3.31 ± 0.79 and 2.91 ± 0.82 respectively. The least satisfaction was experienced in the domain of living environment with a mean score of 1.90 ± 0.81 . There may be several reasons for the variations in different domains of life satisfaction. Adolescence is a period of inclination towards friends and this is reflected in the present study scores of 3.76 in the domain of friends. Only 50% of students have reported satisfactory relationship between parents and this explains the overall low scores in the domain of family. Life satisfaction scores were lowest in the area of living environment, one probable explanation for this could be the low socioeconomic locality where the study was conducted and around 44% of students hail from economically backward families, with family income of less than Rs10,000/ month, which again reflects poor living environment. The overall mean MLSS score of 119.42 ± 4.09 indicates moderate level of life satisfaction. The results of a similar study from Haryana reveals average life satisfaction among students which is comparable to the present study results (Ritu, Punam, 2014)

4.2. Correlation of Life Satisfaction and Academic Performance.

The present study results show a weak positive correlation of 0.26 between life satisfaction and academic performance of students which is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level. The result suggests that life satisfaction enhances academic achievement to some extent and vice versa. The weak correlation may be due to the fact that life satisfaction is a complex construct and there may be other factors that enhance life satisfaction among these undergraduates apart from academic achievement. Life satisfaction may be enhanced by positive relationships, family environment, peer acceptance and good health (Bradley and Corwyn, 2004). This is also in line with the operational definition of life satisfaction as proposed by Lewis et al. (2011) and Pavot & Diener (1993). In this sense, even though academic achievement may be desirable, individual may place different values on them (Diener 1985). Another point that may be observed is that the undergraduates who participated in this study reported moderate life satisfaction and majority had average or below average academic performance, with only around 5.88% of students scoring distinction. This also reflects the importance assigned to academics by these students of whom majority belong to low socioeconomic and educationally backward families and

undertake part time jobs to meet their personal and family expenses. Besides many have reported unsatisfactory relationship between parents and the domain of living environment was scored very low by majority of the students. All these may have contributed to the weak relationship between life satisfaction and academic achievement. However, in today's competitive world these students do understand the importance of academic achievement and a sense of pride that tags along especially for the ones who aim at pursuing higher studies and securing stable jobs. Therefore, though weak yet a significant positive correlation is observed between life satisfaction and academic performance. Gilman and Huebner (2006) noticed that youth reporting low life satisfaction reported higher level of intrapersonal and interpersonal distress and less positive academic experiences than youth reporting higher levels of satisfaction.

4.3. Association between life Satisfaction and Selected Socio Demographic Variables.

The present study results show gender related difference in life satisfaction which is significant at $p < 0.05$ level. Differences between male and female regarding their satisfaction with life have also been reported in several previous studies (Dost, 2007; Goldbeck, Schmitz, Beiser, Herschbach, & Henrich, 2007). The difference in gender based role expectations and the preferred male gender in an Indian socio cultural context could be a reason for significant influence of gender on life satisfaction among students. However, this needs to be explored further to arrive at concrete conclusions. The results also show statistically significant association between relationship among parents and life satisfaction of students. These results are consistent with previous studies which found that children with divorced parents had lower life satisfaction (Pardeck et al., 1991; Zullig et al., 2005).

5. Implications

The present findings have several implications for future research and educational practice. From a practical view point, the present findings indicate the need to consider the "whole student" when developing academic policies, instead of focusing only on classroom teaching and examination. The focus must be on domains that predict overall satisfaction along with academic excellence. That is attention to students' overall needs like healthy leisure activities with friends and more conducive college environment may improve life satisfaction and result in better learning and academic performance.

From a student perspective, students focus only on their academics and isolate themselves from many life satisfying recreational activities. Students consider this sacrifice a worthwhile one for better academic performance. However, the finding of this study supported by previous studies shows that academic performance and life satisfaction are positively and significantly related. Therefore, the results suggest that educational institutions and their policies should convey that it's legitimate to involve in activities that enable students to enjoy their lives along with focusing on academics which will ultimately result in better classroom performance.

6. Conclusion

There were two main limitations in this study. First, the generalizability of the results may be limited because the study used a sample of undergraduate students only from one college in Bangalore. So the results may not be a representative of students in other colleges. Convenient sampling was used and therefore not a true representative sample of the student population. Secondly, the extent to which a reciprocal relationship exists between academic performance and life satisfaction cannot to be affirmed fully, as satisfaction measures used in the present study was only from one-time point. Future research should examine the causal relationship between long-term student performance and satisfaction in greater detail. It is high time that parents and educational institutions fully acknowledge that college students live "integrated lives" like adults and are greatly influenced by the environment that surrounds them (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This acknowledgment is increasingly seen in the domain of work, thanks to organizational researchers for repeatedly proving that work performance can be greatly affected by non work domains (Luthans, 2002). The same is applicable in case of students and their learning environment. This study suggests that life satisfaction is important, not just for student well-being or retention, but also for better academic performance. The results indicate that the greater the understanding of aspects leading to life satisfaction, the better chance of creating effective learning environments.

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