

DETERMINANTS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA'S HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: *The academic performance of students in higher educational institutions is shaped by a variety of factors, both within and beyond the classroom. In Malaysia, where education is highly valued as a pathway to socioeconomic advancement, understanding the key drivers of student success is critical for improving educational outcomes. Among the many influences on academic performance, family support, group discussions, peer interactions, and course assessments stand out as particularly impactful. Family influence, including parental involvement and socio-economic factors, is identified as a key determinant of academic success, providing emotional and financial support that enhances student outcomes. Group discussions and peer interactions are shown to foster collaborative learning, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of course material, with positive peer influence further motivating academic achievement. Additionally, the design and implementation of course assessments significantly impact student motivation and learning approaches, serving as crucial indicators of academic performance. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of family support, group discussions, peer interactions, and course assessments on the academic performance of students in Malaysian higher educational institutions. Using a quantitative research methodology, data were collected from 448 students at Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch (UiTMCK) through structured questionnaires. Proportionate stratified random sampling was utilized and SmartPLS 3.2.1 was used to analyse the data for this study. As a result, peer and course assessments were found to be supportive, while family influence and group discussions did not show a significant impact on academic performance in Malaysia. Understanding how these influences converge provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to improve the quality of education and student outcomes in Malaysia's higher educational institutions.*

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Family Support, Group Discussion, Peers, Course Assessment*

Introduction

Academic performance in higher educational institutions is a critical area of study that influences not only individual student outcomes but also the broader socio-economic landscape of a nation. In Malaysia, the government has invested significantly in enhancing the educational system to foster academic excellence among students at various levels. The Malaysian education system is characterized by a diverse range of institutions, including public universities, private colleges, and vocational schools, each contributing to the academic landscape in unique ways.

Recent studies have identified several determinants that significantly impact students' academic performance in Malaysian higher education institutions. Factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, type of secondary school, family support, and personal motivation have been shown to play pivotal roles in shaping academic outcomes. For instance, a study by Bakar et al., (2023) highlights that socio-economic factors and family background are crucial in influencing students' academic success, suggesting that interventions aimed at supporting disadvantaged students could enhance overall performance in higher education settings.

The academic performance of students in Malaysian higher educational institutions is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, with family influence, group discussions, peer interactions, and course assessments playing particularly significant roles. Family support, encompassing parental involvement, socio-economic background, and educational expectations, serves as a foundational element in shaping students' academic journeys. Students who receive strong family backing often exhibit higher levels of motivation and resilience, which contribute to better academic outcomes. Group discussions and peer interactions are equally crucial, as they provide a collaborative learning environment where students can engage in the exchange of ideas, enhance their understanding of course material, and develop critical thinking skills. Positive peer influence can motivate students to strive for excellence, while the dynamics of group work can foster a deeper comprehension of complex concepts. Course assessments, which include exams, assignments, and continuous evaluations, are direct measures of a student's understanding and mastery of the subject matter. The nature and structure of these assessments significantly influence how students approach their studies, affecting their levels of engagement, preparation, and overall academic performance.

Understanding the impact of these factors is essential for educators and policymakers aiming to improve student outcomes in Malaysian higher education. By fostering a supportive family environment, encouraging meaningful group discussions, leveraging positive peer influence, and designing effective course assessments, institutions can create a more conducive environment for academic success. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how these elements collectively shape the academic performance of students in Malaysia's higher educational landscape.

Moreover, the diversity of the Malaysian student population presents both challenges and opportunities in academic performance. Ethnic disparities in educational attainment have been documented, with certain groups consistently performing better than others. Understanding these dynamics is essential for policymakers and educators aiming to create equitable

educational opportunities. The implementation of targeted programs that address the specific needs of underperforming groups could lead to improved academic outcomes across the board (Hassan et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the academic performance of students in Malaysian higher educational institutions is influenced by a complex interplay of various factors. Continued research in this area is vital to inform educational policies and practices that promote academic success for all students, ensuring that Malaysia can compete effectively in the global knowledge economy. Future studies should focus on longitudinal analyses to better understand the long-term impacts of these determinants on academic performance and to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented educational reforms.

The Problem Statements

Academic performance in Malaysian higher educational institutions has become a pressing concern due to its implications for individual career prospects and national development. Despite significant investments in the education sector, disparities in academic outcomes persist among students from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and educational pathways. Recent studies indicate that various factors, including self-motivation, family influence, and external socio-economic conditions, significantly affect students' academic performance. For instance, Bakar et al., (2023) found that while self-motivation and family support are directly correlated with academic success, other factors such as socio-economic status and ethnic background contribute to performance disparities that remain inadequately addressed in current educational policies and practices.

Moreover, the rapid evolution of educational methodologies, particularly the shift towards e-learning and blended learning environments, has introduced new challenges and opportunities for student engagement and performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact and influence academic outcomes in a diverse educational landscape (Setapa et al., 2024).

This study aims to identify and analyse the multifaceted determinants of academic performance in Malaysia's higher educational institutions, focusing on the interplay between individual, family, and institutional factors. By addressing these gaps, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform policy interventions aimed at enhancing academic performance and promoting equity within the educational system.

Literature Review

This part will discuss in detailed about the dependent and independent variables for this study. The dependent variable is academic performance, meanwhile the independent variables are family support, group discussions, peer interactions, and course assessments.

Academic Performance

Academic performance, which typically refers to the level of achievement students attain in their educational pursuits. This can be measured through various indicators, including examination scores, grade point averages (GPA), and overall academic outcomes.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of academic performance as a critical measure of educational effectiveness and student success. For instance, a study by Raj et al., (2019)

identifies academic performance as the dependent variable in their analysis of factors affecting business students, highlighting its significance in understanding the impact of socio-economic status and communication skills on educational outcomes. Similarly, research conducted by Bakar et al., (2023) reinforces the notion that academic performance is influenced by a multitude of factors, including familial support and socio-economic conditions, thereby establishing a direct link between these independent variables and the dependent variable of academic performance (Shahzad et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2013).

Furthermore, academic performance is often used as a key indicator in educational research to assess the effectiveness of various teaching methodologies and institutional policies. For example, a study on the impact of different variables on academic performance underscores the necessity of understanding how external factors, such as socio-economic background and educational environment, contribute to students' academic outcomes (Tangaraju et al., 2013).

In summary, academic performance serves as a crucial dependent variable in educational research, providing insights into the effectiveness of educational systems and the factors influencing student success in higher education.

Family Support

Family influence is a significant independent variable affecting academic performance in higher educational institutions in Malaysia. Research indicates that various aspects of family dynamics, including parental involvement, socio-economic status, and encouragement, play crucial roles in shaping students' educational outcomes. Studies have consistently shown that parental involvement is positively correlated with academic success. For instance, Ahmad et al., (2017) emphasize that active parental engagement in their children's education significantly enhances academic performance. This involvement can take various forms, including support with homework, attendance at school events, and fostering a conducive learning environment at home.

Family socio-economic status (SES) is another critical factor influencing academic performance. An (2010) found that higher family income enables parents to invest more in their children's education, which is associated with better educational outcomes. Conversely, students from lower SES backgrounds may face financial constraints that hinder their academic performance (Baliyan et al., 2012). The emotional and motivational support provided by families is also crucial. Research by Fitriana et al., (2022) highlights that parental encouragement significantly impacts students' academic self-efficacy and achievement. Students who perceive their parents as supportive are more likely to perform better academically. The influence of family can also vary across different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in Malaysia. Studies suggest that certain cultural values may prioritize education more heavily, leading to differing academic outcomes among various ethnic groups (Bakar et al., 2023).

In summary, the influence of family on academic performance is multifaceted, encompassing parental involvement, socio-economic factors, emotional support, and cultural contexts. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective educational policies and interventions aimed at improving student outcomes in Malaysia. Thus, the authors propose that:

H1: Family Influence is positively significant with the academic performance.

Group Discussion

Group discussion serves as a vital independent variable influencing academic performance in higher educational institutions. Research indicates that engaging in group discussions enhances learning outcomes by fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and active participation among students. Group discussions promote active learning, which is essential for deeper understanding and retention of knowledge. According to a study by Bakar et al., (2023), students who participate in group discussions demonstrate improved academic performance compared to those who engage in traditional lecture formats. This improvement is attributed to the interactive nature of group discussions, which encourages students to articulate their thoughts and engage with diverse perspectives.

Group discussions facilitate the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Research by Ryan et al., (2015) highlights that students involved in group discussions are more likely to engage in higher-order thinking, which contributes to better academic outcomes. The collaborative environment allows students to challenge each other's ideas, leading to a richer understanding of the subject matter. The social aspect of group discussions fosters a sense of belonging among students, which can positively impact their motivation and engagement. A study by Fitriana et al., (2022) found that students who feel connected to their peers in discussion groups are more likely to participate actively and perform better academically. This sense of community can enhance students' commitment to their studies and overall academic success. Group discussions have been shown to improve both short-term and long-term knowledge retention. A study conducted by Setapa et al., (2024) demonstrated that students who participated in structured group discussions after lectures scored significantly higher on assessments compared to those who did not engage in discussions. This suggests that group discussions not only reinforce learning but also help in consolidating knowledge.

In summary, group discussion is a crucial independent variable that positively influences academic performance by promoting active learning, enhancing critical thinking, fostering social connections, and improving knowledge retention. Understanding these dynamics is essential for educators aiming to implement effective teaching strategies in Malaysian higher educational institutions. Thus, the authors propose that:

H2: Group discussion is positively significant with the academic performance.

Peers

Peer influence is a significant independent variable affecting academic performance in higher educational institutions. The dynamics of peer relationships can have both positive and negative impacts on students' academic outcomes, shaping their behaviors, attitudes, and motivation towards learning. Engaging with academically motivated peers can enhance students' performance. Research shows that students who associate with high-achieving peers are likely to adopt similar behaviors, leading to improved academic outcomes. For example, Kharb and Chahal (2023) note that positive peer interactions can foster a supportive learning environment, encouraging students to engage in productive academic discussions and collaborative learning, which ultimately enhances their academic performance.

Conversely, negative peer pressure can lead to detrimental behaviors that undermine academic success. Students may be influenced to prioritize social activities over academic responsibilities, resulting in decreased motivation and performance. Reang and Kaipeng (2022) highlight that negative peer influences can lead students to neglect their studies, skip classes,

or engage in risky behaviors, which adversely affect their academic achievements. The composition of peer groups plays a crucial role in shaping students' academic behaviors. According to a study by Bankole and Ogunsakin (2015), the nature of friendships and peer relationships significantly influences students' academic performance. Positive peer relationships can promote healthy competition and motivation, while negative associations may lead to disengagement and lower academic performance. Peers also provide essential emotional and social support, which can enhance students' academic experiences. A supportive peer network can improve self-esteem and reduce stress, contributing to better academic performance. Kharb and Chahal (2023) emphasize the importance of nurturing positive peer relationships to create an environment conducive to academic success.

In summary, peer influence is a critical independent variable in understanding academic performance in higher educational institutions. The effects of peers can vary widely, highlighting the need for educators and policymakers to foster positive peer interactions and mitigate negative influences to enhance student outcomes. Thus, the authors propose that:

H3: Peers is positively significant with the academic performance.

Course Assessment

Course assessment is a crucial independent variable that significantly influences academic performance in higher educational institutions. The methods and effectiveness of course assessments can impact students' learning experiences, motivation, and ultimately their academic outcomes. Different assessment methods can yield varying impacts on student performance. Struyven et al., (2006) conducted a study comparing multiple choice testing, peer assessment, case-based assessment, and portfolio assessment. Their findings indicate that the type of assessment method employed can significantly affect students' performance, suggesting that more interactive and formative assessment approaches may lead to better academic outcomes.

Students' perceptions of assessment processes also play a vital role in their academic performance. A study by Bembenutty (2009) highlights that students' expectations regarding their grades and their perceptions of the course's effectiveness can influence their motivation and engagement. When students perceive assessments as fair and relevant, they are more likely to perform better academically. Effective course assessments provide critical feedback that can enhance student learning. Research indicates that timely and constructive feedback from assessments helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to improve their academic performance. For instance, a study by Ghadiri et al., (2023) emphasizes that formative assessments, which focus on providing feedback rather than solely evaluating performance, are linked to higher student achievement. The alignment of assessments with course learning outcomes is essential for promoting academic success. Assessments that accurately measure the intended learning outcomes encourage students to engage with the material meaningfully. Research by Bakar et al., (2023) supports this notion, indicating that when assessments are closely aligned with course objectives, students demonstrate improved academic performance.

In summary, course assessment is a vital independent variable that influences academic performance through various mechanisms, including the choice of assessment methods, student perceptions, feedback mechanisms, and alignment with learning outcomes. Understanding these dynamics can help educators design more effective assessment strategies that enhance

student learning and achievement in Malaysian higher educational institutions. Thus, the authors propose that:

H4: Course assessment is positively significant with the academic performance.

Research Framework

Based on a comprehensive review on previous studies, a conceptual framework using hypotheses H1 – H4 is proposed to understand the relationships as presented in Figure 1.

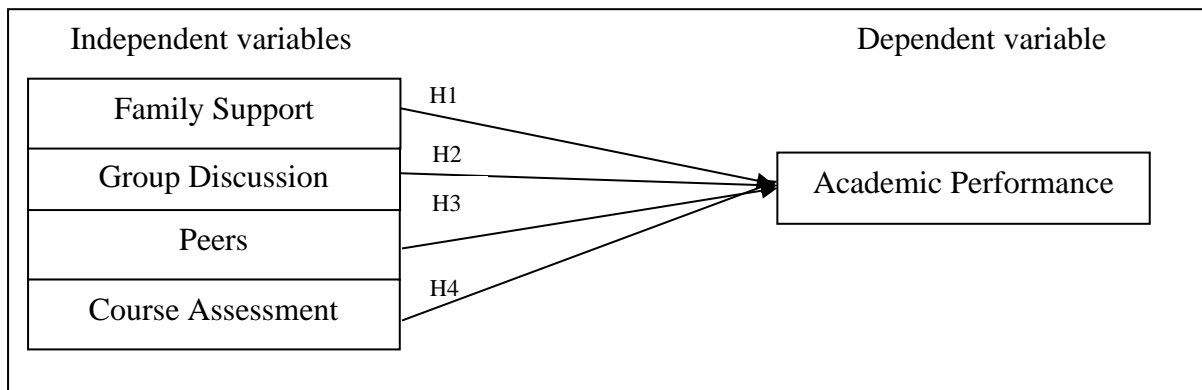


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology

The quantitative research is used in this study. This study also used a descriptive research approach because it was a survey. Students are the individuals who are aware of their academic success while taking into account knowledge of the issue of interest. The students are therefore the sampling units for this investigation. The sample size is 448 based on the enrolment of the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch (UiTMCK).

Questionnaire Design

A set of a questionnaire consisting of three (3) components: A: Demographics, B: Independent Variables, C: Dependent Variables adapted from several sources was distributed to all respondents using Google Forms. The total of questions is 42 items. The questions are graded using a Likert scale using a five-point rating scale. Summaries of the constructs' metrics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Item Measurement of the Study

Construct	No of Item(s)	Source
Family Influence	6	Halawah & Ibtesam, 2006
Group Discussion	10	Lu and Smile, 2022
Peers	7	Sacerdote, 2011
Course Assessment	7	Sewell et al., 2010
Academic Performance	7	Talib & Sansgiry 2012

Data Collection and Analysis

Respondents were selected from the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch (UiTMCK) using simple random selection. The sample size was calculated using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, resulting in four hundred and

fourty eight (448) employees completing the survey. Data were exported and analyzed using SPSS version 28.0 (IBM Corporation). Descriptive statistics were presented as counts and percentages to summarize the collected data. The researcher employed SEM-PLS to examine the factors influencing academic performance among the university's students and to determine the relationships between these factors and academic performance. These students were asked to complete the questionnaire within three weeks, a process facilitated by the researchers to achieve higher response rates. Data were collected and coded before being loaded into SPSS to check for errors and ensure scores were not missing or out of range. Finally, SmartPLS 4.0 was used to test the study's hypotheses.

Findings

This part discussed the findings of the study.

Profile of Respondent

The demographic profile of the study's respondents has been classified into five (5) categories based on analysis with SPSS. They are the current semester, CGPA, programme level, programme name, and gender. The analysis reveals that a total of 448 respondents participated in the survey, with 19.2% being male and 80.8% female. The respondents were primarily pursuing degrees (45.3%), while 54.7% were diploma students. Among the various programs, BA111 had the highest representation with 28.6% of respondents, followed by BA119 at 16.7%. BA232 and BA242 each had 17.6%, and the least represented program was BA250, with only 3.8%. In terms of the current semester, the majority of students (35.7%) were in their third semester, and the smallest group was in their second semester (8%). Regarding academic performance measured by CGPA, 34.4% of respondents had a CGPA of 3.51 and above, while a significant portion (40%) had a CGPA ranging from 3.01 to 3.50. Only a small fraction (0.9%) had a CGPA between 1.50 and 2.00. Overall, the data reflects a diverse student body in terms of gender, program enrollment, semester, and academic performance.

Measurement Model Evaluation of Internal Consistency Reliability

The first criterion to be determined in the measurement model is internal consistency reliability which includes Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Specifically, the composite reliability values should be higher than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014) to show the modest reliability applicable in the research.

Table 1: Internal Consistency Reliability

Construct	Loading range (>0.70)	Composite Reliability (>0.70)	Cronbach's Alpha (α) (>0.60)
Family Influence	0.796– 0.909	0.831	0.807
Group Discussion	0.754– 0.872	0.842	0.830
Peers	0.739– 0.851	0.831	0.817
Course Assessment	0.748– 0.850	0.833	0.817
Academic Performance	0.770– 0.841	0.885	0.827

Table 1 presents the internal consistency reliability for various constructs related to a study. In summary, the constructs of family influence, group discussion, peers, course assessment, and academic performance show strong internal consistency, as indicated by their high loading values, composite reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha scores. This suggests that the measurement model is reliable for these constructs.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model involves the analysis of the relationship between the latent variables or constructs. This includes the collinearity assessment, path coefficient, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) and blindfolding (Hair, 2014).

Assessment of Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 2 shows the R^2 value for the endogenous construct that achieves the acceptable value of R^2 . The determination coefficient (R^2) for academic performance was 0.184, indicating that the model explains approximately 18.4% of the variance in academic performance, which is considered weak. Thus, this model is meaningful with strong predictive capacity.

Table 2: Determination Coefficient (R^2)

Endogenous variable	R^2 value	Threshold
Academic Performance	0.184	≥ 0.19 (weak)

Overall Results of Structural Model Analysis

The results of the hypotheses testing are summarized in Table 3. In conclusion, two (2) hypotheses were accepted in this research.

Table 3: Results of the Structural Model Analysis (Hypotheses Testing)

Hypotheses	Relationship	Standard Beta (β)	Standard Error	t-value	f^2	P value	Decision
H1	Family Influence -> Academic Performance	0.023	0.052	0.448	0.000	0.654	Not Supported
H2	Group Discussion -> Academic Performance	0.031	0.070	0.437	0.001	0.662	Not Supported
H3	Peers -> Academic Performance	0.365	0.064	5.717	0.102	0.000	Supported
H4	Course Assessment -> Academic Performance	0.358	0.074	4.808	0.025	0.000	Supported

* 1.645 - 2.32

** 2.33 and above

** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The academic performance of students in Malaysian higher educational institutions is influenced by a multitude of factors, including family support, peer interactions, group discussions, and course assessments. Understanding these influences is crucial for developing effective educational strategies that can enhance student outcomes. Family support, particularly parental involvement, is a key determinant of students' academic success. Research indicates that a nurturing family environment significantly contributes to better educational outcomes. For instance, a study by Hill and Tyson (2009) emphasizes that while direct parental involvement in school activities is beneficial, the overall family context—characterized by effective communication, supportive parenting practices, and emotional encouragement—has a more profound impact on children's academic performance than mere participation in school events. This suggests that educational strategies should focus on engaging families in a holistic manner, fostering an environment that promotes learning and motivation at home (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Peer interactions and collaborative learning are also critical components of the academic experience. Engaging in group discussions and collaborative activities enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for academic success. According to a study by Johnson and Johnson (2009), cooperative learning environments allow students to benefit from diverse perspectives and shared knowledge, leading to improved academic performance. The Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) underscores the importance of creating a learning ecosystem that includes not only teachers and parents but also peers, thereby reinforcing the educational content delivered in classrooms. Such peer interactions can motivate students and enhance their engagement, ultimately resulting in better academic outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013). Course assessments play a fundamental role in shaping academic performance in higher education. Assessments serve not only to evaluate students' understanding of the material but also to provide feedback that guides their learning processes. The integration of formative assessments—such as quizzes, presentations, and peer evaluations—into the curriculum is encouraged in Malaysia to promote continuous learning and improvement. Research by Hattie and Timperley (2007) indicates that timely feedback on performance fosters self-reflection and encourages students to adjust their study habits, leading to enhanced academic achievement. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that combines family support, peer interactions, and effective assessment strategies is essential for optimizing academic performance among students in Malaysian higher educational institutions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013).

In summary, the academic performance of students in Malaysian higher educational institutions is shaped by a complex interplay of family support, peer interactions, and course assessments. By fostering a supportive family environment, encouraging collaborative learning among peers, and implementing effective assessment strategies, educational stakeholders can significantly enhance student outcomes. This comprehensive approach is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students and optimizing their academic success in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, academic performance in Malaysian higher educational institutions is significantly influenced by a support system comprising family influence, peer interactions, and effective assessment strategies. Research indicates that active family participation fosters higher academic outcomes and promotes a growth mind set. Furthermore, peer interactions and group discussions enhance critical thinking and problem-solving skills, while formative assessments provide timely feedback that guides learning and encourages self-reflection. By integrating these elements, educational stakeholders can create a robust framework that improves academic performance and prepares students for success in a complex world, effectively addressing their diverse needs. Moreover, peer interactions and group discussions are essential for developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are vital for academic success. Cooperative learning environments allow students to share diverse perspectives, thereby enriching their educational experience. Additionally, the implementation of formative assessments provides timely feedback, guiding students in their learning journey and promoting self-reflection. By integrating these elements—family support, peer collaboration, and effective assessments—educational stakeholders can create a robust framework that not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world. This comprehensive approach is essential for addressing the diverse needs of students and ensuring their success in higher education.

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