



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BASED ON
GENDER, RACE, STRESS AND SLEEP QUALITY**

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STRESS AND SLEEP QUALITY**

EUGENIE MOK YEN LING

This project is submitted
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore gender, race, stress and sleep quality as factors which influence the academic performance of undergraduate students. The samples of study involved 80 students from the Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The research instrument which will be used in data collection is via questionnaire which consists of demographic information, stress questionnaire (Student Stress Inventory (SSI)) and sleep quality questionnaire (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)). The academic performance of the undergraduate students in this study is measured by their cumulative grade point average (CGPA). The result of the study shows that female students performed better than male students; whilst non-Bumiputera students performed better than Bumiputera students. The study also found that the higher the stress level of a student (SSI score), the lower his or her CGPA results. Moreover, the findings showed that there is a significant difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on their sleep quality, in which the mean of CGPA for students with good sleep quality is higher than that of students with bad sleep quality. Several limitations were encountered in this study as well, including failure to generalise the findings of the study to represent the whole population of university students and usage of questionnaires. These limitations can be overcome through careful procedures and other methods.

Keywords: gender, race, stress, sleep quality, students, academic performance

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka faktor-faktor seperti jantina, bangsa, tekanan dan kualiti tidur yang mempengaruhi prestasi akademik pelajar sarjana muda. Sampel kajian melibatkan 80 pelajar dari Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Instrumen kajian yang akan digunakan dalam pengumpulan data adalah melalui soal selidik yang mengandungi maklumat demografi, soal selidik stres (Inventori Stress Pelajar (SSI)) dan soal selidik kualiti tidur (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)). Prestasi akademik pelajar sarjana dalam kajian ini diukur dengan purata nilai gred kumulatif (PNGK). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa prestasi akademik pelajar wanita adalah lebih baik daripada pelajar lelaki; manakala prestasi akademik pelajar bukan Bumiputera adalah lebih baik daripada pelajar Bumiputera. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa semakin tinggi tahap tekanan seseorang pelajar (skor SSI), semakin rendah skor PNGK. Selain itu, hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam prestasi akademik pelajar FCSHD berdasarkan kualiti tidur mereka, iaitu purata PNGK bagi pelajar yang mempunyai kualiti tidur yang baik adalah lebih tinggi daripada pelajar yang mempunyai kualiti tidur yang kurang baik. Terdapat beberapa kekangan yang dihadapi dalam menjalankan kajian ini, termasuklah kegagalan untuk merumuskan hasil kajian untuk mewakili keseluruhan populasi pelajar universiti dan penggunaan soal selidik. Keterbatasan ini boleh diatasi melalui prosedur yang teliti dan kaedah-kaedah lain.

Kata kunci: jantina, bangsa, tekanan, kualiti tidur, pelajar, prestasi akademik

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study explores gender, race, stress and sleep quality as factors that influence academic performance of undergraduate students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The main objective is to determine if there are differences in students' academic performance based on gender, race, stress and sleep quality respectively. This study will focus on undergraduates from the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, UNIMAS.

1.1 Background of study

University life is often deemed as one of the most stressful periods in a student's life. As students struggle to cope with exams, social pressures and future careers, many find themselves unable to deal with the situation. Some of them seek the easiest way out by ending their lives without thinking of the consequences. The American College Health Association (ACHA) conducted a survey and reported that the suicide rate among young adults, whose age were in the range between 15 to 24 years old, has tripled since the 1950s and currently, suicide is known to be the second most common cause of death among college students (Henriques, 2014).

Furthermore, 7% of teenagers in Malaysia were reported to have committing suicide thoughts and the percentage of those who have turned the thoughts into actions were about half the percentage of those who have thought of committing suicide (Kok & Goh, 2011). In a study by Mustaffa, Aziz, Mahmood and Shuib (2013), the statistics released by the National Suicide Registry Malaysia (NRSRM) suggested that the number of suicides had peaked dramatically in the last three years (1,156 victims) whereas the national statistics showed that

females' suicidal rate was higher than males by the ratio of 3:1. Hence, the rate of suicides was indeed alarming.

There are many factors that lead to suicide including physical illness, unwillingness to seek help, isolation and feelings of hopelessness. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand that academic performance is also one of the factors that can lead to suicides among students. A good education is important as it is an asset of a lifetime. According to Regier (2015), academic success is vital due to it being closely linked to the positive outcomes we value. For instance, those who do well in their studies are more likely to get hired and less likely to get involved in criminal activity and are happier than those who do not do well academically. Moreover, students who performed better in school were better able to make the transition into adulthood and to achieve occupational and economic success. On the other hand, according to Lageborn, Ljung, Vaez & Dahlin (2017), low educational attainment is correlated with a higher risk of suicide. According to Sin Chew daily, a suicide case was reported which involved a female student from Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TARUC). It was found that the pressure she experienced from life and studies were too much for her to handle, hence they were the main reason the suicide occurred (Kwan, 2017). Moreover, similar case took place in Mumbai, India where Saha (2017) reported that due to being depressed about failure in examinations, a male student at the age of 24 had committed suicide by jumping out of a 19th-floor hotel room.

Previous studies had been conducted to identify some of the factors that may have a huge impact on students' academic performance. According to Houston (2016), past researches tend to focus more on factors such as personality traits, cognitive ability and motivational factors such as academic locus of control and self-efficacy which affect academic performance, however, little has been known whether demographic factors such as gender and race will have an impact on student's academic performance or not. Moreover, it

is known that factors such as stress and sleep quality play a prominent role in determining students' academic performance, however the results obtained from past researches were contradictory.

According to Dayioğlu, and Türüt-Aşık (2007), gender plays a role in determining the academic performance of students. It was reported that females outperformed their male counterparts in higher education in terms of their CGPA. However, in another study, it was reported that there was no significant difference between females and males in their academic performance (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2010). According to Buadi (2000), gender difference as it affects students' academic performance is inconclusive.

Apart from gender, race is also an important factor which contributes to academic success. According to Tang and Daneil (2017), their findings indicated there was a significant difference in the mean CGPA among different races of students. In a study by Che Azmi and Harith (2012), it was found that non-Bumiputera Malaysians performed academically better than Bumiputera Malaysians across different cognitive level examination questions. Furthermore, in another study by Alfian and Othman (2005), it was reported that Chinese students performed better academically than Malay and Indian students.

Besides, Girdwain (2012) reported that stress and sleep quality were associated with students' academic performance. It was found that too much stress and lack of sleep could have an impact on an individual's concentration and attention, which then led to low academic performance as information were unable to be encoded and retained in the long-term memory. According to Cliniciu (2013), stress can come in different kind of ways and the impact it leaves on an individual depends on how the individual copes with the tension. Studies had shown that the major causes of student's dropout from universities were academic and adjustment issues.

In the year 2004, the Mental Health Task Force on Graduate Student Mental Health at the University of California Berkley carried out a survey on its graduate students and it was reported that 45% of them had experienced stress-related problem in the last 12 months which had a significant impact on their academic performance. Apart from stress, students also experienced sleep deprivation due to academic factors such as exams and assignments. In an article by Curcio, Ferrara and Gennaro (2006), most people tend to sacrifice their sleeping time in order to cope with their daily activities in the hope that this decision will not cause any lethal effects but will enable them to carry out their daily activities. However, their findings revealed that students who had poor sleep quality had a lower academic performance. In a study by Mintz (2017), it was found that out of 145 suicide victims who were examined from the year 2014 to 2015, 63 of them, before their death, experienced academic pressure.

Overall, suicide rates in universities are on the rise. Therefore, it is necessary that the correlation between gender, race, stress, sleep quality and academic performance be assessed so that universities can make policy decisions on how to respond to the problem as stress and sleep play a vital role in the overall well-being of a student, which helps in reducing suicide rates.

1.2 Problem statement

Stress and sleep quality issues have always been a major concern among students when it comes to achieving good grades. According to the American Psychological Association (2017), teenagers reported that stress had an impact on their sleep and they did not acquire the sufficient amount of sleep as recommended, which was about 8.5 to 9.25 hours, instead they slept 7.4 hours a night during school days. Furthermore, 24% of teenagers reported that they have poor sleep quality, of which 35% reported that stress was the major

cause that they could not fall asleep and ended up lying awake at night in the past month.

According to Correa, Oliveira, Pizzamiglio, Ortolan and Weber (2017), it was reported that first and second year students experienced worst sleep quality and also greater daytime dysfunction.

In addition, according to the American College Health Association (2013), of all undergraduate students being surveyed, it was reported that almost half (46.3%) of them felt trauma or overwhelmed with regards to their academic responsibilities. Moreover, in another study by Veena and Shastri (2016), it was reported that in general, the greatest sources of academic stress experienced by students was found in sitting and studying for exams and to master a huge amount of content in a short amount of time. It was reported that 39% of teenagers with higher stress levels felt even more stressed if they did not obtain adequate sleep.

Besides, a study conducted by Gall, Evans and Bellerose (2000) had shown that entering university might bring strain or stress as university students encounter a change in the education system and social lifestyle whereas in a study conducted by Siraj et al. (2014), it was stated that stress in academic environment can bring both positive and negative effects. Unfavourable stress can hinder the learning process and is associated with the inhibition of students' academic performance. According to Sörberg, Zeebari, Lager, Gunnell, Allebeck and Falkstedt (2017), it was found that academic performance was a strong and robust predictor of suicide attempt. Thus, the ability to manage stress and having sufficient sleep is important as low academic performance is associated with a higher risk of suicide.

Moreover, Ahrberg, Dresler, Niedermaier, Steiger and Genzel (2012) stated that students who are generally poor sleepers are not the ones who performed the worst, but instead students who seemed to be more stressed and experienced poor sleep quality tend to

perform the worst academically. Despite the findings reported from previous studies stating that students who did not acquire sufficient amount of sleep and were too stressed scored badly in examinations, however, in a study, it was shown that participants who experienced severe stress tend to score a higher CGPA when they were able to manage their stress well. This was supported by Akgun and Ciarrochi (2003), where their findings showed that academic stress was negatively associated with academic performance and students who were highly resourceful were able to better manage academic stress.

Meanwhile, according to Dayioğlu, and Türüt-Aşık (2007), gender may be a factor in contributing to student's academic performance. It was reported that females scored better than their male counterparts in higher education in terms of their CGPA. This was supported by another study by Khwaileh and Zaza (2010) where their findings showed that females outperformed their male counterparts in their GPAs. Ismail and Othman (2006) also reported that female students were observed to obtain higher grades compared to male students and it was noted that gender played a vital role in influencing success in the university. Although previous studies showed that females tend to do better than males academically, however, in a study by Faisal, Shinwari and Hussain (2017), it was reported that there was no significant difference in academic performance based on gender.

In terms of race and academic performance, Che Azmi and Harith (2012) reported that across different cognitive level examination questions, non-Bumiputera Malaysians performed academically better than Bumiputera Malaysians. In another study conducted by Lee (2007), it was found that racial diversity has a negative impact on minority races' academic performance. It was reported that Indians and Malays achieved lower academic performance compared to Chinese students who constituted the majority of students.

It is clear that several studies were conducted on stress, sleep quality and academic performance (Curcio et al., 2006; Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Siraj et al., 2014) and also race and gender differences on academic performance but the findings were inconsistent.

According to Lee (2007), there is a need in acquiring a better understanding of the effects of ethnic composition and school racial on academic performance. Thus, it is useful to carry out this study to determine if there are differences in undergraduates' academic performance based on gender, race, stress and sleep quality respectively in order to obtain a more in-depth knowledge.

1.3 Research Objective

The proposed present research will be conducted among FCSHD undergraduates in UNIMAS to study the following objectives.

1.3.1 Main Objective

To understand academic performance based on gender, race, stress and sleep quality among FCSHD undergraduates in UNIMAS.

1.3.2 Specific Objective

Specifically, the study intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine if there is a difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on gender.
2. To determine if there is a difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on race.
3. To determine if there is a relationship between stress and academic performance among FCSHD undergraduates.

4. To determine if there is a difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on sleep quality.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

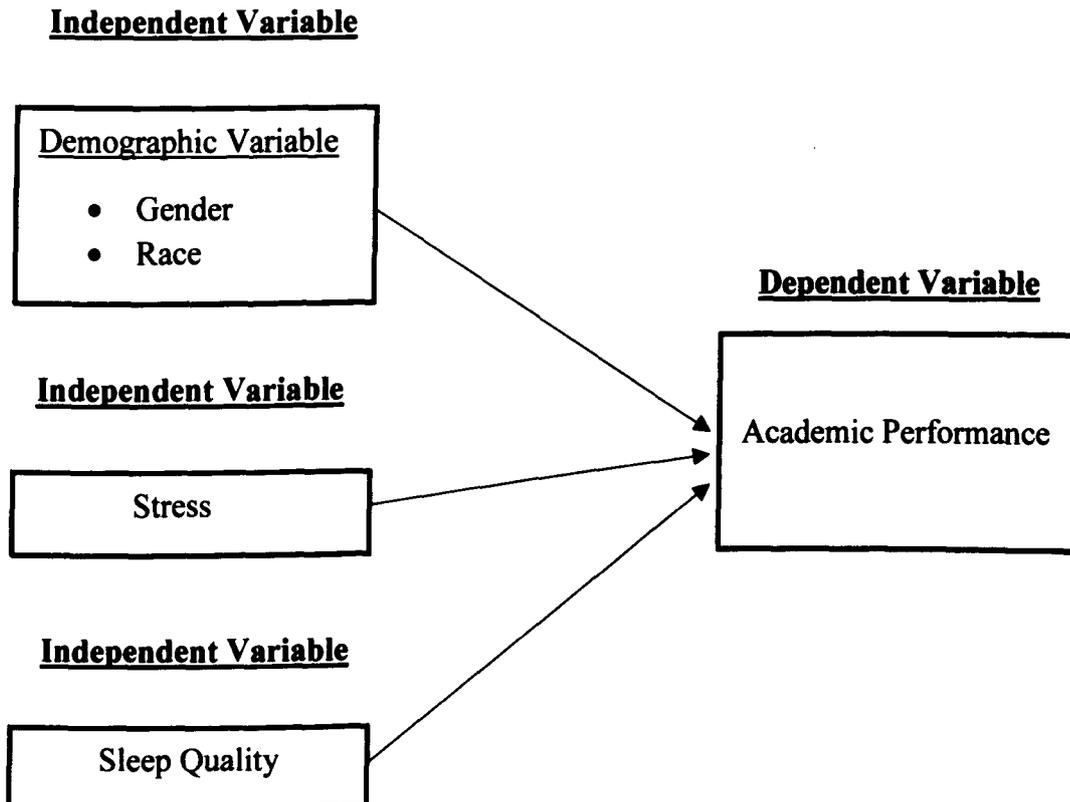
H_0 1: There is no significant difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on gender.

H_0 2: There is no significant difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on race.

H_0 3: There is no relationship between stress and academic performance among FCSHD undergraduates.

H_0 4: There is no significant difference in FCSHD undergraduates' academic performance based on sleep quality.

1.5 Conceptual framework



The conceptual framework of this study is shown above where there are 4 independent variables which are gender, race, stress and sleep quality and 1 dependent variable which is the academic performance of students. This conceptual framework serves as a guideline for future researchers who wish to study similar research on how gender, race, stress and sleep quality influence academic performance.

1.6 Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Stress

Conceptual Definition

Stress is defined as the physical, mental, or emotional strain and the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or demands placed on them (UK Health and Safety Executive, 2012).

Operational Definition

Stress refers to the stress levels experienced by UNIMAS students. As stress is unavoidable and varies accordingly for each individual, higher stress level can interfere with their daily routine including sleep quality and academic performance. In this study, stress level is measured by using stress questionnaire (Student Stress Inventory (SSI)).

1.6.2 Sleep Quality

Conceptual Definition

Sleep quality refers to how good or bad an individual's sleep is. It is defined by feeling rested and restored or feeling tired on waking and

throughout the day and also the number of awakenings experienced during the night (Harvey, Stinson, Whitaker, Moskovitz & Virk, 2008).

Operational Definition

Sleep quality of UNIMAS students varies accordingly. Some students may experience bad sleep quality including sleep deprivation due to coping with assignments and exams, which in the long run can have a negative impact on their academic achievement and also physical and mental health. In this present study, sleep quality is measured by using sleep quality questionnaire (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)).

1.6.3 Academic Performance

Conceptual Definition

Academic performance refers to the extent to which a person has accomplished specific educational goals in an instructional environment (Steinmayr, Meißner, Weidinger & Wirthwein, 2015). According to Santrock (2006), academic achievement refers to the knowledge and skills a student has learnt and is usually measured through assessments such as standardized tests and performance assessments.

Operational Definition

Academic performance refers to the academic results obtained by UNIMAS students every semester. In this present study, academic performance is measured based on students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Table 1 shows the grading system used by UNIMAS.

Table 1

UNIMAS Grading System

Grade	Range of Marks	Grade Value	Academic Performance
A	80-100	4.00	Distinction
A-	75-79	3.67	
B+	70-74	3.33	Good
B	65-69	3.00	
B-	60-64	2.67	Credit
C+	55-59	2.33	
C	50-54	2.00	
C-	45-49	1.50	
D	40-44	1.00	Fail
F	<40	0.00	

1.7 Significance of the Study

The topics related to gender, race, stress, sleep quality and academic performance might be an interesting topic to study. According to Richter (2015), with academic demands and extracurricular activities, students had no choice to work continuously until they go to bed at night feeling exhausted. Not much emphasis had been placed on the importance of sleep and students were not aware they were actually sleep deprived when they thought they were only tired. In fact, students would rather give up sleep than having their daily activities removed. It was evident that the amount of sleep required by each individual differs, so as the level of stress. Each individual tends to respond to stress differently and the level of stress each individual is able to take differs accordingly. Besides, there was a knowledge gap as to

whether males or females performed better academically. Moreover, it was evident that race do play a role in academic performance. Thus, this research on how gender, race, stress and sleep quality could influence students' academic performance is worth discussing and is conducted in the hope of providing useful information to those involved and to serve as a future reference for researchers who wish to conduct similar studies.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations in carrying out this study is the generalisation of population. Since the number of participants are 80 and the research is to be conducted in a higher-level institution in Malaysia (UNIMAS), thus, the results may not be accurate enough to generalise the whole population of undergraduates based on their academic performance in Malaysia. Besides, the usage of questionnaires can also be regarded as one of the limitations of this study as it is not the best method to collect data.

1.9 Summary

The relationship between gender, race, stress, sleep quality and academic performance is an interesting topic to discuss as there exists knowledge gap as to whether females performed better academically or males and also whether stress and sleep quality affects academic performance or not. Thus, this study aims to seek and understand academic performance of undergraduates of FCSHD, UNIMAS based on gender, race, stress and sleep quality.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

University life is one of the most stressful periods in a student's life. Some students find it hard to cope with the pressure and ended up committing suicide to ease the pain once and for all. It was reported that academic performance is correlated with higher risk of suicides and gender differences may be one of the factors in determining students' academic performance. Besides, previous studies showed contradictory results in which some studies reported that high level of stress and poor sleep quality are significantly correlated with poor academic performance whereas some studies reported otherwise (Curcio et al., 2006; Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003; Mesquita, Soares, Graciano, Silva, Andrade & Reimão, 2011). Since the main reason for the increase in the rate of suicides was due to academic factor, therefore it is necessary that the correlation between gender, race, stress, sleep quality and academic performance be assessed so that a more in-depth knowledge on how they are related to each other can be obtained.

2.1 Discussion of Past Similar Findings

2.1.1 Gender and Academic Performance

According to Dayioğlu, and Türüt-Aşık (2007), gender plays a role in determining the academic performance of students. It was reported that females scored better than males in higher education in terms of their CGPA whereas in another study by Khwaileh and Zaza (2010), similar results were reported where females tend to do better academically than males which was in contrary to the stereotypical beliefs where women do not work as hard as men and that female students achieved lower academic scores.

However, in a study by Ebenuwa-Okoh (2010), it was found that there was no significant difference in academic performance in terms of gender. This was supported by Goni, Yagana, Ali and Bularafa (2015) where their findings showed that there was no significant difference between gender and academic performance in Colleges of Education in Borno State. Therefore, these contradictory results showed that this topic was worth to discuss and explore.

2.1.2 Race and Academic Performance

According to Lee (2007), researchers have lost sight of the importance of social context measured in terms of racial and ethnic composition as a factor in influencing academic performance of students and hence there is a need to gain a more clearer understanding of the consequences that racial differences has on academic performance.

According to Tang and Daneil (2017), their findings indicated there was a significant difference in the mean CGPA among different races of students. In a study by Azmah Othman and Noor Azina Ismail (2006), it was reported that the academic performance of Malay students is significantly lower than their non-Malay counterparts.

Besides, in another study by Alfian and Othman (2005), it was stated that students' performance in a multi-racial country such as Malaysia can become a concern especially if the students' performances vary amongst the major races. In their study, it was found that Chinese students perform better academically than Malay and Indian students.

2.1.3 Stress and Academic Performance

Stress is unavoidable in our everyday life, however it is manageable.

Stress occurs when there are changes in the emotion, physical or behaviour of an individual or a combination of all three aspects such as memory problems, inability to stay focus, self-doubt, depression, moodiness, anxiety, indigestion, chest pain, increase intake in alcohol or caffeine to feel relaxed, sleeping too little or too much and also feeling demotivated. Prolonged stress can be detrimental to our health as it contributes to heart disease, hypertension and affects the efficiency and ability of an individual to make decisions. (Stress Management Society, 2017).

In a study by Khan and Chaudary (2014), students of a public university experienced stress which resulted in their inability to meet academic goals, poor academic performances, continuous decline in grades and also increased behavioural and psycho-social problems. Moreover, stress is common in higher education institutions. In a study by Wintre and Yaffe (2000), it was reported that the rise in stress levels during the first year predicted lower grade point average (GPA).

In addition, in a study by Misra, McKean, West and Russo (2000), it was reported that undergraduate students experienced higher stress due to academic commitments and poor time management skills. If the stress that the students encountered has been negatively perceived, it could influence their health and academic performance.

Furthermore, Sloboda (1990) stated that stress led to low academic performance in university. In Sloboda's study, it was noted that students