# The Relationship Between Academic Challenges and Academic Performance among Working Postgraduate Students

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## ABSTRACT

One of the most important outcomes of the educational process is successful academic performance which is a reflection of the information, abilities, and attitudes that are developed via the experiences that are gained in university. This performance holds special significance for postgraduate students who struggle to balance jobs and educational obligations because it has an influence on both the success of their careers and their own personal growth. In this study, the academic challenges that working postgraduate students at UiTM Shah Alam encountered are investigated. Particular attention is focused on aspects like psychological well-being, peer group influences, financial management, and time management. In accordance with Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity, data were gathered from 158 respondents through the use of a questionnaire with a quantitative research design. According to the results, there is a significant relationship between psychological well-being and time management with academic performance. As a result, psychological well-being and time management emerged as significant predictors of performance. The necessity of holistic support systems became more apparent. The fact that students had to deal with financial difficulties, despite their prevalence, underlined their endurance and resourcefulness in balancing dual tasks. In conclusion, the study suggests a specific solution that might be used to address these obstacles, improve educational experiences, and encourage academic success among working postgraduates. These findings are intended to contribute to the formation of institutional policies and to the promotion of an academic climate that is more welcoming to students from a variety of backgrounds.

**Keywords**: Academic challenges, Academic performance, Peer group influence, psychological well-being

## INTRODUCTION

Education plays a crucial role in personal and societal development. It not only shapes people's mindsets but also contributes to physical and mental health, improving overall well-being and living conditions (Shavkidinova et al., 2023). Education is vital on both an individual and global scale, promoting peace and security by fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse viewpoints. There are no age restrictions for education; learning is a lifelong process, and people of any age can enhance their knowledge, whether it is through acquiring new skills, languages, or perspectives. This is particularly relevant to working individuals who seek further education to improve their career prospects and gain specialized knowledge (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2022).

Many people today pursue higher education, especially postgraduate programs, to gain extensive knowledge and skills in their fields of study. However, balancing the demands of both academic and professional life presents challenges. The increasing number of individuals juggling work and postgraduate education can experience significant stress from their conflicting responsibilities. Factors such as inflexible schedules, high stress levels, and overwhelming workloads have emerged as challenges that affect these individuals' ability to manage both commitments effectively (Bartlett et al., 2021). Moreover, maintaining a demanding work schedule often leads to physical exhaustion, which can impair concentration and hinder academic progress.

Although previous studies have examined individual factors associated with academic performance, there remains a need to understand these factors collectively within the context of working postgraduate students. The present study therefore focuses specifically on working postgraduate students at UiTM Shah Alam and examines

psychological well-being, peer group influence, financial management, and time management in relation to academic performance. The original study identifies this context-specific gap and seeks to examine factors associated with the ability of students to balance work and academic responsibilities.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

As postgraduate students working while studying, academic challenges has emerged as a significant aspect impacting their academic performance (Maharani et al., 2020). The performance is influenced by factors such as psychological well-being, peer group influence, financial management, and time management, which serve as independent variables while academic performance is the dependent variable.

## Academic Performance

Academic performance among working postgraduate students is shaped by the challenges of balancing work and study, managing stress, and limited access to support services (Maharani et al., 2020). Research by Griffin (2022) shows that the demands of both work and higher education negatively affect students' academic success, as work often takes time and mental energy required for studying. Cognitive overload from managing these tasks can lead to increased stress and burnout, reducing focus and academic engagement (Madigan & Curran, 2021). Academic success is vital for career advancement and personal development, with high performance leading to improved job prospects, higher earnings, and greater leadership opportunities (Soon et al., 2020).

## Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being significantly impacts academic success, especially for working postgraduate students who face challenges in balancing academic, professional, and personal responsibilities (Abu Bakar et al., 2023). Key aspects like emotional stability, stress management, and purpose are essential for academic performance, as elevated well-being positively correlates with engagement and effective coping (Mustafa et al., 2020).

Recent studies by Beltran-Velasco et al. (2021) show that students' ability to manage stress and adapt is crucial for academic success, with stressful events negatively affecting their psychological well-being and academic outcomes.

**H1**: Psychological well-being significantly predicts academic performance among working postgraduate students.

## Peer Group Influence

The influence of peers plays a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes, habits, and academic success, with supportive peer groups fostering an environment conducive to learning, cooperation, and motivation (Tu & Chu, 2020; Cayubit, 2022). Students are more likely to develop good study habits and seek help when peers prioritize academic success (Tu & Chu, 2020), while negative peer influences may lead to disengagement and disruptive behaviour, resulting in academic decline (Contreras-Quiroz et al., 2022).

**H2**: Peer group influence significantly predicts academic performance among working postgraduate students.

## Financial Management

The impact of financial management on the academic performance of employed postgraduate students can be thoroughly examined through Walberg's theory which highlights the interrelated aspects influencing educational results (Marks & O'Connell, 2023). Financial difficulties directly reduce motivation, a fundamental component of learning, as students struggle to balance financial challenges with educational responsibilities (Cao et al., 2024). These challenges also disrupt the home environment, essential for supporting learning, leading to stress, reduced study time, and emotional strain (Hasyim et al., 2023).

**H3**: Financial management significantly predicts academic performance among working postgraduate students.

### Time Management

Efficient time management is essential for optimizing academic performance, particularly for students balanci-

ing academic and professional responsibilities. Walberg (2001) highlights the limited time available for learning, underscoring the need for effective time utilization. This is particularly critical for working postgraduate students who must juggle their academic and work commitments (Rockman et al., 2022). Arumugam et al. (2021) emphasize that poor time management, such as procrastination, negatively impacts academic success. Effective time management strategies, such as structured planning, help students allocate time for classes, assignments, and self-study, enhancing both performance and retention (Rockman et al., 2022).

**H4**: Time management significantly predicts academic performance among working postgraduate students.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity

This study is guided by Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity, which provides a framework for understanding factors associated with educational outcomes. Within the context of working postgraduate students, the theory provides a useful basis for considering the interaction between student-related characteristics, learning-related conditions, and the time available for learning.

Psychological well-being represents an important student-related factor.

Peer group influence represents the social environment surrounding the student.

Financial management represents an important resource-related condition.

Time management reflects students' ability to allocate limited time to academic activities.

Academic performance represents the educational outcome.

Accordingly, the study proposes that these four factors are associated with the academic performance of working postgraduate students.

## METHODOLOGY

This research’s sampling frame focused on working postgraduate students in UiTM Shah Alam. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used, and a minimum sample size of 129 respondents was determined based on Cohen’s Power Tables and G*Power software. The questionnaire was distributed to 172 respondents. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the dataset, a thorough data cleaning process was conducted. This involved filtering responses using predefined criteria and removing any incomplete or inconsistent data. After this process, 158 valid responses remained eligible for further analysis. The final sample size (n = 158) exceeds the minimum required sample of 129, confirming that the dataset is sufficient for drawing meaningful and reliable conclusions.

### Measurement Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections. Section A collected demographic information about the respondents, while Section B measured the study variables, namely psychological well-being, peer group influence, financial management, time management, and academic performance. All constructs were measured using multiple items adapted from previous studies and assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Psychological well-being was measured based on items assessing respondents’ emotional stability, ability to manage stress, and psychological condition. Peer group influence measured the extent to which respondents perceived support, interaction, and influence from their peers in relation to their academic activities. Financial

management assessed respondents' ability to manage financial commitments while pursuing postgraduate education. Time management measured respondents' ability to plan, organise and prioritise academic and work-related activities.

Academic performance was measured using scale perception items based on the schedule, productivity and various study techniques. Higher scores indicated a higher level of perceived academic performance.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between independent variables (psychological well-being, peer group influence, financial management, and time management) and academic performance. Psychological well-being showed a moderate to strong positive correlation (r=0.567), while peer group influence and financial management had moderate associations (r=0.450 and r=0.378). Time management had the strongest correlation (r=0.618), highlighting its crucial role in academic success. Additionally, intercorrelations between the independent variables, such as time management with psychological well-being (r=0.537) and peer group influence with time management (r=0.490), suggested that emotional health and peer relationships indirectly enhance academic performance by improving time management skills.

**Table 1. Correlation Analysis**

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological Well-Being | **1** | .444** | .496** | .537** | .567** |
| Peer Group Influence | | **1** | .331** | .490** | .450** |
| Financial Management | | | **1** | .495** | .378** |
| Time Management | | | | **1** | .618** |
| Academic Performance | | | | | **1** |

## Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether psychological well-being, peer group influence, financial management, and time management significantly predicted academic performance.

**Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis**

| **Model** | **B** | **Std. Error** | **Coefficient Beta** | **t** | **Sig.** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(Constant)** | -0.55 | 0.333 | | -0.165 | 0.869 |
| **Psychological Well Being** | 0.339 | 0.084 | 0.303 | 4.02 | <.001 |
| **Peer Group Influence** | 0.112 | 0.063 | 0.123 | 1.77 | 0.079 |
| **Financial Management** | -0.012 | 0.074 | -0.011 | -0.158 | 0.875 |
| **Time Management** | 0.498 | 0.096 | 0.4 | 5.187 | <.001 |
| ***F* value** | | | 33.95 | | |
| **Sig** | | | <.001[b] | | |
| **Adjusted R2** | | | 0.456 | | |
| **R2** | | | 0.47 | | |

The regression model was statistically significant, $F = 33.950$, $p < .001$, and explained 47.0% of the variance in academic performance ($R^2 = .470$). The adjusted $R^2$ was .456, indicating that the model explained approximately 45.6% of the variance after adjustment for the number of predictors.

Psychological well-being was a significant positive predictor of academic performance ($\beta = .303$, $p < .001$). Time management also demonstrated a significant positive contribution ($\beta = .400$, $p < .001$).

In contrast, peer group influence did not make a statistically significant unique contribution to academic performance ($\beta = .123$, $p = .079$). Financial management also did not make a statistically significant unique contribution ($\beta = -.011$, $p = .875$).

# DISCUSSION

### Psychological Well-Being and Academic Performance

Working postgraduate students face multiple demands arising from employment, academic requirements, and personal responsibilities. Maintaining psychological well-being may therefore help students remain engaged with academic activities and manage the demands associated with postgraduate study. The finding also supports the broader argument that psychological factors should be considered when examining academic performance among students who combine employment and higher education. However, because this study employed a cross-sectional design, the result should be interpreted as a statistical association rather than evidence that psychological well-being causes higher academic performance.

### Peer Group Influence and Academic Performance

Peer group influence demonstrated a significant positive correlation with academic performance ($r = .450$). However, it did not make a statistically significant unique contribution to academic performance in the multiple regression model ($\beta = .123$, $p = .079$). This difference between the correlation and regression results is important. The significant correlation indicates that peer group influence was associated with academic performance at the bivariate level. However, after psychological well-being, financial management, and time management were considered simultaneously, the unique contribution of peer group influence was no longer statistically significant. One possible explanation is that the relationship between peer group influence and academic performance may overlap with other factors in the model. For example, supportive peer relationships may contribute to students' psychological well-being or facilitate better management of academic responsibilities. These possibilities should be examined in future studies rather than assumed from the current findings. Financial management also did not demonstrate a statistically significant unique contribution to academic performance ($\beta = -.011$, $p = .875$). This finding is noteworthy because financial management showed a significant positive bivariate correlation with academic performance ($r = .378$). The difference between the correlation and regression results indicates that the observed bivariate association may overlap with other variables included in the model. It is therefore inappropriate to conclude that financial circumstances have no relevance to working postgraduate students. Rather, the present findings suggest that financial management did not explain additional variance in academic performance after psychological well-being, peer group influence and time management were taken into account.

### Financial Management and Academic Performance

Financial management showed a significant positive bivariate correlation with academic performance ($r = .378$). However, it did not significantly predict academic performance in the regression model ($\beta = -.011$, $p = .875$). This finding should not be interpreted to mean that financial issues are unimportant to working postgraduate students. Rather, the result indicates that financial management did not explain additional variance in academic performance when the other predictors were included in the regression model. The difference between the correlation and regression results suggests that the association between financial management and academic performance may overlap with other factors examined in this study. Future research could investigate whether financial management operates indirectly through psychological well-being, stress, workload, or other student-related factors.

### Time Management and Academic Performance

Time management was the strongest predictor of academic performance in the regression model ($\beta = .400$, $p < .001$). It also demonstrated the strongest bivariate correlation with academic performance ($r = .618$). This finding is consistent with the importance of time allocation in the educational productivity framework. Working postgraduate students have to distribute limited time among employment, academic activities, and personal responsibilities. Effective planning and prioritisation may therefore be particularly relevant to their ability to complete academic tasks and maintain academic engagement. The result is also consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of effective time management and structured planning for academic success (Arumugam et al., 2021; Rockman et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it was found that time management and psychological well-being has a significant relationship towards academic performance. This aligns with Mustafa et al. (2020), who argued that mental well-being fosters greater commitment, concentration, and problem-solving abilities. Psychologically stable students are better able to respond to academic demands, make rational decisions, and stay motivated (Guamanga et al., 2024). Effective time management allows students to plan, organize, and prioritize their academic tasks efficiently, reducing stress and promoting a sense of control over their studies. The findings indicate that psychological well-being and time management were significant predictors of academic performance among the respondents. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the study, these findings should be interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal effects.

From the results, it was demonstrated that peer group influence and financial management do not significantly influence the academic performance. The study found no statistically significant relationship between peer group influence and academic performance, suggesting that, within this sample, peer dynamics may not directly impact student performance. Although peer group influence and financial management demonstrated statistically significant bivariate correlations with academic performance, neither variable made a statistically significant unique contribution to academic performance when psychological well-being and time management were simultaneously included in the multiple regression model. This suggests that their associations with academic performance may overlap with the effects of the other predictors included in the model. Programs like debt management and savings plans could support postgraduate students and improve their academic focus. These results enhance the body of knowledge, aligning with Walberg's Theory of Educational Productivity, and emphasize the importance of emotional health and self-management practices. Policymakers in higher education institutions are encouraged to implement programs supporting psychological well-being and time management. The study suggests further research in diverse cultural and institutional contexts, as well as the role of online learning and AI tools, to deepen understanding and improve educational practices for working postgraduate students.

### Practical and Institutional Implications

The findings provide several implications for higher education institutions, particularly institutions that enrol substantial numbers of working postgraduate students. First, universities could provide targeted psychological well-being support, including counselling services, stress-management programmes and workshops designed specifically for students managing employment and postgraduate study simultaneously. Second, institutions could provide structured time-management support through workshops focusing on academic planning, assignment scheduling, research planning and prioritisation of competing work and academic responsibilities. Third, flexible academic arrangements, where academically and operationally feasible, could be considered to accommodate working postgraduate students. Examples include flexible consultation hours, selected hybrid learning opportunities and structured academic milestones. Finally, academic programmes could strengthen early identification of students experiencing difficulties in managing their academic and professional commitments so that appropriate support can be provided before their academic performance is adversely affected.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should focus on the unique needs and experiences of working postgraduate students balancing education, full-time jobs, and family responsibilities, as they face different pressures than full-time students. Longitudinal research is recommended to understand how they manage duties and academic demands over time, highlighting key moments where additional support may be needed.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

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