

**THE REASONS OF LOW-ACHIEVEMENT AS PERCEIVED
BY THE STUDENTS OF THE ISLAMIC
UNIVERSITY OF GAZA (IUG)**

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أسباب تدني التحصيل كما يدركه طلبة الجامعة الإسلامية بغزة

Abstract The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons of low-achievement as perceived by the students of the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG). Subjects of this study were 82 students including 42 males and 40 females. All subjects were identified as receiving an academic warning during the second semester for the year 2000.

A valid and reliable instrument was designed for this study. Subjects completed a questionnaire regarding reasons of low achievement. The results showed that the most prominent reasons of low-achievement as perceived by students were: Textbooks don't come on time "arrive late", low family's income, home's atmosphere is not suitable for study, and students were anxious about the future and its ambiguity. More information was discussed and recommendations were issued.

ملخص هدفت هذه الدراسة للبحث عن أسباب تدني التحصيل كما يدركه طلبة الجامعة الإسلامية بغزة بلغت عينة هذه الدراسة حوالي 82 طالب وطالبة ، منهم 42 طالب و40 طالبة ، جميع هؤلاء الطلبة من الذين حصلوا على تحذير أكاديمي خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني للعام 2000.

لقد تم تصميم أداة من أجل هذه الدراسة ، والتي خضعت لعلمي الصدق والثبات . جميع عينة الدراسة قاموا بالإجابة على الاستبانة الخاصة بأسباب تدني التحصيل . لقد أظهرت النتائج بأن أهم أسباب تدني التحصيل من وجهة نظر الطلبة كانت : عدم وصول الكتب في الوقت المحدد "يتأخر وصولها" وتدني دخل الأسرة ، وجو المنزل غير مناسب للدراسة بالإضافة إلى قلق الطلبة من المستقبل وغموضه ، وفي نهاية البحث تم مناقشة النتائج وعرض بعض التوصيات.

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Theoretical background

The problem of low-achievement has become one of the important issues that encounter many academic settings and need urgent solutions. This is because of the increase of students' number who receives academic warning. As this is not restricted to one academic setting, but it includes many academic settings around the world.

Low-achievement is a serious problem that confronts many educators. According to Wilkie et al. (1992), as many as 30% of the American students face a high risk of educational failure. Ciaccio (1998) commented that the use of fear is the reason for failure. He strongly believes that fear "destroys intelligence". His article explains different procedures that help low achieving students feel successful and describes how he found out which students believe them to be low-achievers. The key is to find ways in the classroom to help students feel successful. Prohm et al. (1995) suggested certain practices for setting, timing, and teaching methods. Class size should also be kept at 15 students to see an increase in achievement as well. Students need to feel part of the regular mainstream and feel positive about themselves and not a constant fear of failure. Similarly, Almasri (1987) pointed out that the reasons of low-achievement go back to: (a) students' lack of time organization skills, (b) students do not use study skills e.g.: methods of reading, note-taking, exams readiness methods, and methods of managing and organizing time, (c) there is no enough scientific background before entering university. Almasri taught students study skills, which helped increasing the level of achievement. Moreover, El-Shami and Ghanayem (1992) investigated the reasons of low average for male and female students in the King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. The results indicated that: (a) personal reasons have less effect on the low average of male and female students, whereas the educational reasons have more effect on their low average, (b) both of students and faculty members agreed that personal and educational reasons have effect on the low average of students respectively. More recently, Arroyo, Rhoad, and Drew (1999) reported a number of recommendations found through extended studies conducted over a 20-year period, in a variety of settings, and with students of different demographic characteristics. In their research they identified 41 factors related to student low-achievement. The 41 factors were narrowed down to the top ten most influential and each factor was briefly discussed. The ten

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influences are teacher behavior, teacher expectations, curriculum relevance, class size, disengagement from school-related activities, confidence in the student's ability to achieve, high mobility in school attendance, parental expectations and involvement, level of parents' education, and poverty or low income.

Suleiman (1988) conducted a study about "Study Habits and its relation with academic achievement". The results of this study indicated that there is strong relation between study habit skills and academic achievement. Another study for Alqadi (1988) entitled "Factors affecting the total average as perceived by university students", concentrated on the relation between total average of the student and a number of variables. This study pointed out that the most prominent factors affecting the students' total average of King Fahd University in Dhahran were: Average grade point in high school, having a car, studying in library, practicing sports, playing cards, and study habits.

In 1990, Hassan investigated the reasons that lead to low achievement as perceived by the university students of Saudi Arabia. It was found that the reasons of low-achievement were:

- Postponing study till the end of semester.
- Lack of organization in study.
- A lot of term papers assigned for courses.
- Bearing some of family responsibilities.
- Lack of supporting material for the course work
- Students don't spend enough time for study.
- Lack of academic advisor to guide student.

Heiman and Slomianko (1988) prepared a program about "learning to learn", which contributed in providing students with analytical thinking styles and some study skills. This program increased their academic achievement, raised their average and lowered their academic warning.

Low-achievement refers to those students who did not achieve the required standard compared to their peers (Ingram, 1960). For the purpose of this study, low-achievement refers to students in the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) who receives an academic warning. According to the IUG policy, students will receive an academic warning if they earn a cumulative grade point average less than 1.75 (i.e. less than 65% out of 100 scale). They will be placed on academic warning during the next semester of

enrollment. To remove the status of academic warning, a student must earn a cumulative grade point average of 1.75 or above by the next semester following the notification of being placed on academic warning. Any student who fails to remove the academic warning status during his/her first semester of re-enrollment will be placed on academic warning.

Most of the previous studies concentrated on study skills, study habits and their relation to low-achievement. Moreover, no research has been conducted to investigate the problem of low-achievement. Just very few studies have been conducted on this topic, which is very important for the university students. This study will deal with the reasons of low achievement as perceived by the students of the Islamic University.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons of low achievement as perceived by the students of IUG, and to find out if there is a significant difference between males and females. The review of literature of this study suggested the following questions:

1. What are the most prominent reasons of low-achievement as perceived by the male students of the IUG?
2. What are the most prominent reasons of low-achievement as perceived by the female students of the IUG?
3. Is there a significant difference in perceiving the reasons of low-achievement between male & female students?

Methodology of the study

The researchers selected the analytical descriptive method, which describes the reasons of low achievement from the analysis of the data, which is collected from the sample without the intervention of the researcher, to achieve the aims of the study.

Population of the study

The population of the study includes the whole students who have academic warning in the second semester for the year 2000 with a total number of (720) students as shown in table (1).

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Table (1)
Percentage of male and female students
who achieved less than 65% in the second semester for the year 2000

Semester	Year	of male students	%	of female students	%
second	2000	538	27%	192	25%

Note: This information has been collected from students academic services office.

Sample of the study

The data was collected from the Students Academic Services Office at the IUG for for the year 2000, second semester as shown in table (1).

The sample of this study was drawn from the second semester, for (10%) of the total population shared in this study, with a total of 82 subjects (42 male and 40 female).

Instrument

For the purpose of this study a questionnaire was constructed depending on theoretical framework and previous studies. The purpose of the questionnaire was to investigate the reasons of low-achievement as perceived by male and female students of the IUG. The questionnaire was first consisted of 30 items. The items represented the following three domains:

1. Educational domain: It contains seven items with numbers: 1, 6, 10, 13, 16, 21, and 22.
2. Socio-economic domain: It contains eight items with numbers: 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 14, 17, and 19.
3. Psychological domain: It contains seven items with numbers: 3, 5, 8, 12, 15, 18, and 20.

Validity of the instrument

1- Face validity

Face validity was done for the instrument by getting feedback of five professors of the College of Education at IUG (see appendix 1). This review resulted in the exclusion of 8 items and rewording some of the remaining 22 items (see appendix 2).

2- Internal consistency validity

The validity of internal consistency was used by finding out the correlation coefficient between the degree of each item and the total degree of its domain as shown in Table 2.

Table (2)
Correlation Coefficient between the degree of each item and the total degree of its domain (n=30)

Educational domain		Socio-economical domain		Psychological domain	
Item #	r	item #	r	item #	r
1	0.373	2	0.633	3	0.470
6	0.720	4	0.693	5	0.579
10	0.482	7	0.490	8	0.616
13	0.493	9	0.668	12	0.475
16	0.519	11	0.570	15	0.469
21	0.651	14	0.484	18	0.700
22	0.390	17	0.595	20	0.725
		19	0.725		

Note: This table shows that all items were significant at the .05 level.

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Also the internal consistency was conducted for the questionnaire by finding out the correlation coefficient between the degree of each domain and the total degree of the whole questionnaire as shown in Table 3.

Table (3)
The correlation coefficient between the degree of each domain and the total degree of the whole instrument (n=30)

Domain description	r	Level of significance
1. Educational domain	0.774	sig. at the 0.05
2. Socio-economic domain	0.791	sig. at the 0.05
3. Psychological domain	0.770	sig. at the 0.05

Note: all domains were significant at the .05 level.

Reliability

1- Cronbach alpha

The Cronbach Alpha was used to detect the reliability of the instrument giving a score of (0.83).

2- Split half

Person correlation was counted between the scores of odd items and the scores of even items giving a value of 0.663. This value was corrected by using Spearman Brown formula, which was:

$$r = \frac{2r}{1+r} = 0.795$$

Procedure

Because of the sensitivity of the study and in order to keep the privacy and the confidentiality of the issue of academic warnings; each one of the 82 students who received an academic warning was called individually to the Students Academic Services office. With the presence of the Director of Students Academic Services, the researchers met with each student. During these meetings, the proposed study was discussed, the procedure was explained, and the questionnaire was reviewed and distributed (42 male and 40 female), Questionnaire administration took place

in the office of the Director of Students Academic Services.

Results

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons of low achievement as perceived by the students of IUG, and to find out if there is a significant difference between male and female.

The first research question investigated in this study was: What are the most prominent reasons of low-achievement as perceived by male students of the IUG? . To answer this question frequencies & percentile were computed (see Table 4)

The overall result showed that more than 70% of male students. Indicated that the most prominent reasons of low-achievement were:

- Anxious about the future and its ambiguity (item # 3).
- Low Family’s income (item # 2).
- Textbooks don’t arrive on time "comes late" (item # 13).
- Home’s atmosphere is not suitable for study (item # 9).
- A lot of course work (item # 10).
- Working to support the family (item # 19).
- Family problems causing bad psychological atmosphere for study .
 - Low income and less chance of work after graduation.

Table (4)

Frequency Percentage for Male students about the reasons of low-achievement for each domain and for each item

frequency Percentage for domain	frequency percentage for item	mean for items	low	Med.	High	Item	No.
67.12	67.46	2.02	10	21	11	many students in study rooms	1
	58.73	1.76	17	18	7	academic supervision is not enough	6
	74.60	2.24	7	18	17	many courses with a lot of homework	10
	76.19	2.29	5	20	17	Books does arrive on time "comes late"	13
	65.87	1.98	13	17	12	low of academic standard in high school	16

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66.17	65.87	1.98	13	17	12	objectives of courses aren't clear	21	B*
	61.11	1.83	20	9	13	studying in specialization without desire	22	
	77.78	2.33	5	18	19	low-income for family	2	
	57.14	1.71	21	12	9	low family interest for educated sons	4	
	70.63	2.12	10	17	15	low income and less chance of work after graduation	7	
	76.19	2.29	9	12	21	there is no suitable atmosphere for study at home	9	
	55.56	1.67	22	12	8	no cooperation among family members	11	
	50.00	1.50	28	7	7	family is not aware for the value of university education	14	
58.04	68.25	2.05	11	18	13	need for money to buy books & references	17	C*
	73.81	2.21	12	9	21	busy in work to afford family	19	
	79.37	2.38	7	12	23	anxious of future & its ambiguity	3	
	71.43	2.14	11	14	17	family problems causing bad psychological atmosphere for study.	5	
	52.38	1.57	26	8	8	moody relation between student & professor	8	
	69.05	2.07	11	17	14	fear and anxiety of exams	12	
	63.49	1.90	16	14	12	weak attention because of hot weather in summer & cold in winter inside rooms	15	
	65.08	1.95	13	18	11	study rooms not suitable for university education	18	
	63.49	1.90	16	14	12	getting absent-minded during lectures	20	

A* = Educational reasons

B* = Socio-economical reasons

C* = Psychological reasons

The second research question investigated in this study was: What are the most prominent reasons of low-achievement as perceived by female students of the IUG?. To answer this question frequencies and percentile were computed (see Table 5).

The overall result showed that more than 70% of female students indicated that the most prominent reasons of low-achievement were:

- Fear and anxiety of exams (item # 12).
- Textbooks don't arrive on time "comes late" (item # 13).
- Anxious about the future & its ambiguity (item # 3).
- Family's conflict (item # 5).
- Poor attention spans because classrooms are not air-conditioned. (item #15).
- Low high school's grade point average (item # 16).
- Low Family's income (item # 2).
- Home's atmosphere is not suitable for study (item # 9).
- Too many students in the classroom (item # 1).
- Can't afford the expense of the education (item # 17).
- Lack of academic supervision (item # 6).
- Lack of work opportunities after graduation (item # 7).
- Family is not aware for the value of university education.
- Fretful relationship between family's members (item # 11).

Table (5)

Frequency Percentage for female students about the reasons of low-achievement for each domain and for each item

frequency Percentage for domain	frequency percentage for item	mean for items	low	Med.	High	item	No.
71.43	73.33	2.20	4	24	12	many students in study rooms	1
	71.67	2.15	9	16	15	academic supervision is not enough	6
	69.17	2.08	11	15	14	many courses with a lot of homework	10
	80.00	2.40	4	16	20	Books does not arrive on time "comes late"	13

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70.21	74.17	2.23	10	11	19	low of academic standard in high school	16	B*
	64.17	1.93	9	25	6	objectives of courses aren't clear	21	
	67.50	2.03	12	15	13	studying in specialization without desire	22	
	74.17	2.23	8	15	17	low-income for family	2	
	60.83	1.83	17	13	10	low family interest for educated sons	4	
	71.67	2.15	8	18	14	low income and less chance of work after graduation	7	
	74.17	2.23	12	7	21	there is no suitable atmosphere for study at home	9	
	70.00	2.10	11	14	15	no cooperation among family members	11	
	70.83	2.13	10	15	15	family is not aware for the value of university education	14	
63.33	72.50	2.18	10	13	17	need for money to buy books & references	17	C*
	67.50	2.03	11	17	12	busy in work to afford family	19	
	80.00	2.40	7	10	23	anxious of future & its ambiguity	3	
	78.33	2.35	9	8	23	family problems causing bad psychological atmosphere for study.	5	
	58.33	1.75	18	14	8	moody relation between student & professor	8	
	90.00	2.70	3	6	31	fear and anxiety of exams	12	
	76.67	2.30	8	12	20	weak attention because of hot in summer & cold in winter inside rooms	15	
65.00	1.95	16	10	14	study rooms not suitable for	18		

	58.33	1.75	16	18	6	university education getting absent-minded during lectures	20
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- A* = Educational reasons
- B* = Socio-economical reasons
- C* = Psychological reasons

The third research question was: What is the difference between male & female students of IUG in perceiving the reasons of low-achievement?

To detect the difference between male and female students the t-test was used (see Table 5). The results of this question were as follows:

1. As for the first domain (Educational reasons) there was no significant statistical difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between males and females.
2. For the second domain (Socio-economical reasons) there was no a significant statistical difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between male and female.
3. For the third domain (Psychological reasons) there was no significant statistical difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between males and females.
4. The total score for the three domains there was no significant statistical difference at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between male and female.

By using t.Test for two independent samples, the Mean, standard deviation and t value were executed and shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Mean, std. Deviation, t value and the significance

Domain	Gender	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	T .value	Sig.
Educational	Male	42	14.00	2.95	0.36	Non sig.
	Female	40	14.27	3.68		
Socio-economical	Male	42	15.61	4.20	0.55	Non sig.
	Female	40	16.10	3.62		
Psychological	Male	42	13.71	3.16	1.47	Non sig.
	Female	40	15.00	4.57		
Total	Male	42	43.3	6.73	1.31	Non sig
	Female	40	45.4	7.52		

Note: the tabled “t” at df (80) and sig. level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) = 1.99

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Discussion

The general finding of this study is expected, at least on a broad conceptual level. The underlying dynamics that link low-achievement to educational, socio-economical, psychological, factors are familiar in the educational settings. Educational institutions all over the world are working hard to improve the academic standard of their students. Investigating problems students encounter with low-achievement, whether they are educational, socio-economical, psychological, or others problems, is the key to the improvement.

From the results of this study it was concluded that:

The most important reasons of low-achievement for both male and female students of the IUG were:

- Textbooks don't come on time "comes late".
- Low family's income.
- Home's atmosphere is not suitable for study.
 - Anxious about the future and its ambiguity.

This study agrees with the study of Elshami and Ghanayem (1992) in personal and educational reasons, but this study added new domain named "psychological domain" which fits the Palestinian subjects, and this is different from the whole previous studies of Ciaccio (1998) , Prohm (1995) , Almasri (1987), (Arroyo, Rhoadand Drew, 1999, Suleiman (1988) and Alqadi (1988) where these studies concluded that reasons of low-achievement in general are related to : fear of failure , teaching methods, class size, study habits and skills, reading methods, notetaking, teacher behavior and expectations, confidence in the student's ability to achieve, parental expectations and involvement, and poverty or low income .

From the investigators' experience at IUG, there were evidences that support these reasons of low-achievement. Books always arrive late, few weeks after the starting of each semester. The administration of the IUG should tackle this problem immediately. Low-income of the family affects students achievement, because they can't buy references and can't face the demands of the university. Also, there is no suitable atmosphere for study at home. Many students are living in slums (e.g. camps and crowded areas), that are not suitable for studying. Finally, students are anxious of the future and its ambiguity because of the Israeli occupation for Gaza strip, which

lasted for more than 34 years causing many educational, economical, social and psychological problems.

It is concluded from the results of this study that there is a joint effect between socio economical and psychological domains. The researchers believe that social and economical life affected -- the psychology of students and made them anxious.

Finally, the investigators recommend that the administration of the IUG should meet the students' needs and solve their problems. They should help in solving the problem of books, help the students of low income, help in finding places for study because the library is small, and hasn't enough facilities. Also, the university should provide counseling that help in finding jobs for students after graduation.

Implication for Practice

Low-achievement is a pervasive problem, which results in a tremendous waste of human potential, even among the most able students. People tend to lump low-achievers together and treat them all alike, but this just doesn't work. Low-achievers need to be differentially diagnosed and differentially treated. The following are some recommendations and considerations to effective coping strategies to bolster the problem of low-achievement at the university level:

- Provide cooperative, non-competitive academic climate.
- Discuss coping mechanisms for everyday life.
- Students need teachers with a "How can I help you best learn?" not a "Do - what I say!" approach.
- Have students earn make-up grade; you can always find something
- Make physical learning environment attractive -Small group instruction
- Make sure that assigned tasks are realistic, so that all students can complete them if they really try.
- Focus student's attention on his or her own progress, not on their classmate's performance.
- Give every student opportunities to demonstrate competence in the class.
- University should match caring, skilled, experienced teachers who have realistically high expectations with low-achieving students.
- Schools should take steps to increase students' confidence and expectations for academic success.

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Appendix (1)

The name of the qualified professors who refreed the instrument

Name	Position
1. Dr. Mohammed Zaquot	Dean of college of education
2. Dr. Mahmmod abu Daff	Head of philosophy of education department.
3. Dr. Izzo Afana	Assistant professor
4. Dr. Atef Al- Agha	Assistant professor
5. Dr. Hamdan Al- Soufi	Assistant professor

Appendix (2)

Items which were excluded of the instrument

Description of item	title of domain	r
- study books & references of specialty are few .	Educational	0.328
- low-standard of faculty members in teaching.	Educational	0.220
- pattern of study differs between high school & university.	Educational	0.327
- death of one parent.	Socio-economical	0.342
- early marriage during study.	Socio-economical	0.335
- feel depressed because my specialization is against my desire.	psychological	0.129

Note: This table shows that these items were not significant at the 0.05 level.