



EXPLORING THE REASONS OF ACADEMIC PROBATION AMONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract:

A significant number of private university students are placed on academic probation, especially in their first year and many of them hardly succeed in their future academic careers. Students on academic probation are more probable to face numerous academic difficulties, are unfortunately more likely to drop out from the university. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the students who end up on academic probation and the reasons of academic probation. Hence, this study was conducted to determine the reasons of academic probation among the students at a private university in Bangladesh. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed to categorize different reasons of academic probation like various academic concerns, personal concerns, study practices, preferences in learning techniques and learning materials etc. In the study, responses from a total number of 344 probation students from different semesters were collected. The results of this study revealed poor study habits and lack of seriousness in studies; weak writing and presentation skills; difficulty in understanding the English language; previous weak academic background; difficulty with test/ exam taking; wrong course or study subject selection; poor interaction with teachers; unfamiliar with grading system; irregular in class attendance and lack of academic goal setting; health problems; family problem; residential issues, too much involvement with unimportant and unnecessary activities, lack of self-motivation are the identified accusable reasons by the probation students. The findings may help the university authority to design and administer the required academic and non-academic support programs for the probation students to retain the number of dropout students.

Keywords: academic probation, reasons of academic probation, private university education in Bangladesh

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1. Introduction

Students admitted into higher educational institutions with a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds and educational experiences. According to Santa and Scranton (2001), factors that contributed to the academic difficulty for a university student are academic subject, institutional atmosphere, faculty interaction, peer influence, career choice, study habits, self-efficacy and self-inspiration. These factors differ from one to another as the characteristics of the individual student are different and in order to provide the appropriate type of support and assistance to each individual proper identification is required. Olson (1990) argued that students may have high self-efficacy to support their academic accomplishments or oppositely may have low self-efficacy which can be harmful to their success. Students are required to learn and understand the consequences of their actions and decisions. According to Kelley (1996), in choice making the students must make the final decisions although the advisors or faculty member can guide the student to identify strategies and resources.

In academic life, sometimes the students deal with multiple non-academic issues such as; mental health, family problems, financial struggles, and work priorities which may become a decisive reason for them (Lucas, cited in Ahmed et al., 2014). Therefore, a student needs to realize and uncover the non-academic problems and create a plan for success with the help of an academic adviser or a faculty member.

The transition into the university can also affect students' academic success, especially during their first semester. This transition can be tough for students as they lack knowledge on how to find themselves as learners at university, how they should learn, how to set academic goals and how to progress toward them. Hence, it is very hard to get success at university for the first-year students as they need to deal with new academic surroundings, policies, procedures and academic expectations.

All the higher educational institutions have a set of guidelines by which students must abide in order to stay enrolled as a student. If a student fails to meet the set of criteria, they may be put on academic probation, which serves as a warning. The term "Academic Probation" is indicative of academic status for the students who do not meet the minimum academic requirements of a university or college in a specified academic term. Academic probation is the most common term used by universities across the world in order to indicate that a student is not making academic progress as per the graduation requirement of those institutions. Academic probation means that students' grades or overall Grade Point Average (GPA) are not sufficient enough to continue if they do not improve and they are at high risk of dropping out. Students can be found on academic probation for a variety of reasons, i.e., academic or non-academic, and it could result in a student's suspension or expulsion from the institution.

In general, a student is placed on academic probation when the accumulative grade point average (GPA) is below 2.00. The student who fails to meet the minimum academic requirements when on academic probation is subject to academic disqualification. Failure to reach the minimum academic standards (achieving the GPA

2.00) in the following semester may result in academic dismissal from the university. This means the student is no longer eligible to continue their academic journey at the university.

A university or institute may put a student on academic probation because of cumulative GPA or because of the GPA required for a major. A single semester of poor grades (usually below 2.00). There are many reasons why students may be put on academic probation. Some of the most common causes are:

- 1) Skipping classes,
- 2) Too many courses in a semester,
- 3) Poor study habits,
- 4) Unbalanced schedule,
- 5) Unexpected personal events,
- 6) Stress or anxiety,
- 7) Disinterested to a major,
- 8) Too much partying.

The students who are on academic probation, revealed by research, typically earn less than a grade point average of 2.00, have the poor academic preparation, lack of regular study habits and study skills, and face difficulties in transitioning and adjusting to university life (Coleman and Freedman, 1996). Probationary students also have lower levels of motivation which impact their self-beliefs and the control they need to have in improving their academic standing. Academic probation is an intermediate time period for a student who is given time to improve academic performance and failing to improve bad grades may result in academic dismissal.

A student placed on probation during a period for low performance or bad conduct may face expulsion after the trial period if the student's performance does not improve. The reasons of academic probation are similar in many cases for students. Brown (1953) revealed 122 different problems for academic probation that were common to 20 per cent or more of the entire sample group. For example, adjustment to college or university, getting low marks, fearing failure in college, not knowing how to study effectively, being forced to take uninteresting courses, obtaining marks that do not measure ability fairly, not taking things seriously enough, failing in many efforts, and not attaining goals, etc.

Research has proved that one of the possible reasons of academic probation is students' incapability to master university-level coursework or the courses at the university they are currently attending. Dunn (2001) suggested that an individual's learning style affects classroom performance. They propose a model which suggests students learn in a variety of ways. If students are uninformed of their learning styles or attempt to study in ways that do not fit their styles, they hamper their own performances. Personality factors such as the need for achievement (McClelland, cited in Kelly, 1996), openness to experience, and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1987) may also contribute to how a student approaches the demands and expectations of universities. Other factors such as learning disabilities, self-concept, and health may also contribute to

student performance. Brinckerhoff (1989) stated that many students experience academic difficulties because they have an unassessed learning disability.

Kelley (1996) explained that in an academic setting, students need to choose how to allocate their time. Although evidences suggest that students do not always make dynamic choices. It is the student's choice to decide whether or not to study and prepare for courses. Unhealthy learning environments refrain students from studying which ultimately leads to poor academic performance. Some students experience social pressures at university which is not conducive to learning. Moreover, a student may not perform well in a course because of no or less interest in the subject, or lack of interaction with a particular course teacher due to the student's favourable learning style. Also, students' attitude to failure reflects their mentality toward learning. Some consider academic probation seriously as a bad experience and try to overcome the situation, and oppositely, some students deliberately overlook it.

2. Objective of the study

Stimulated by the earlier research findings of the reasons for students' academic probation, this study focused to investigate the reasons of academic probation identified by undergraduate students in private universities in Bangladesh. There have been very few studies conducted on this particular issue in Bangladesh. The findings of this study may work as a document on recognizing the reasons for academic probation of private university students and may provide assistance to create and implement relevant student support programs by higher education quality management authorities in Bangladesh.

3. Research methodology

The methodology of the study is described through the nature of the study, the sample and sampling design, instruments of data collection, and data analysis. These are spelt out in the following sections:

The study was descriptive in nature by following the quantitative research approach. A total number of 344 students, recorded in academic probation from different academic disciplines, from a renowned private university in Bangladesh were selected as samples by following the purposive sampling. Out of these 344 students, 99 were on probation for consecutive semesters and 245 were in the first-time probation category. For this study, it was imperative to take the probation students as respondents.

The data were summarized, tabulated and analysed to maintain the objectives of the study. Data gained from the participants have been analysed in a narrative form. A semi-structured questionnaire served as a data-gathering instrument for this study. Questionnaire items were developed from the existing literature. Complete answers were collected from total 342 students, and the other 2 provided partial responses.

4. Findings of the study

A list of question items was presented to the participants in a semi-structured questionnaire format. The participants had to specify how they perceive these factors for academic probation. On the basis of the responses from the students, the factors causing academic probation are divided into two main categories (academic concerns and personal concerns) and are discussed below:

4.1 Academic concerns

The reasons causing academic probation related to academic concerns are:

4.1.1 Poor study habits and lack of seriousness in studies

It is evident by research findings that students with poor study habits find it difficult to perform well at the university. University courses are difficult and intensive in nature and demand good conceptual knowledge and effective study skills. Students, who do not appear and pay attention to the class lectures and review the materials regularly, are the most vulnerable to poor academic performance. Students who perform poorly have described their study practice as inadequate or study habits of just before the examination.

4.1.2 Weak writing and presentation skills in English

The medium of instruction in most of the private universities in Bangladesh is English. Understanding the English language is a strong determinant of academic success. In order to comprehend the class lectures and text material, students needed to have a reasonable understanding of the English language. Also, the tests and presentations which carry a good portion of the marks required the students to have good command in English. In higher studies, the available textbooks and resource materials are written in English. Most of the students who came from Bangla medium background find it quite difficult to adjust to the English medium of instruction from the very first semester. Therefore, difficulty in using the English language has been identified by the students for falling into academic probation.

4.1.3 Previous weak academic background

The previous academic background of a student also plays a vital role in determining academic probation. As the students of this, from whom the response was gathered, came from different educational backgrounds and different educational achievements. Usually, students with previous strong academic performance begin university courses in better ways due to possessing sound knowledge and clear concepts of the subject matters. Oppositely, students with a weak or poor educational background find it difficult to grasp the subject matter due to a lack of prior adequate knowledge and clear concepts. University courses cover a wide range of learning areas and demand a fast-

learning ability from the students. Hence, previous weak educational background contributed to a student's poor performance, which lead to academic probation.

4.1.4 Difficulty with test/ exam taking

In secondary and higher secondary education, the exam was mainly summative and written based on nature. Students' performance was assessed at the end of an academic year. However, unlike schools and colleges, university teachers assess students' performances based on quizzes, in-course exams, presentations, assignments and final examinations. Therefore, it is important to attend all the exams in due time to get a good score. Most private universities require a student to get a 60% score to achieve a passing grade which is equivalent to grade point 2.0. Students who are not familiar with new and diversity of assessment procedures find it difficult to get a good score, ends up with poor grade and ultimately find themselves on academic probation.

4.1.5 Wrong course or study subject selection

Unsuitable course or study subject selection works as a serious reason for academic probation among private students in Bangladesh. In most cases, students tend to choose courses or subjects by pressure from parents, family members and are sometimes influenced by their peers which put them in a difficult situation and resulted in poor academic performances. In addition, personal course or subject choices by students sometimes also be incorrect. Thus, lack of interest in particular courses and incapability to grasp the content of the courses throw the students to failure.

4.1.6 Poor interaction with teachers

Effective communication skill is very important for good academic performance. Effective communication or interaction with the course teachers is necessary for a university student which helps to clarify unclear and difficult topics. At the same time, communication with teachers helps students to set realistic and achievable academic goals. Students with poor communication with the course teachers compared to those with better communication skills were underperformed, and that lead them to academic probation.

4.1.7 Lack of clear academic goal setting

Students having problems with setting a clear goal in academic performance often tend to perform poorly. A clear academic goal helps students to get motivated to perform well. When students lack academic goal setting, they are irregular in class, and less interested to take part in class activities.

4.1.8 Time management

The duration of a semester in a private university is too short to comprehend and perform several courses properly if the students are not confident and motivated. It is very important for the students to manage their time accordingly to their preferences. Students

spending maximum time with their friends, and sleeping find it really hard to manage time for studying three of four courses in a semester of three months.

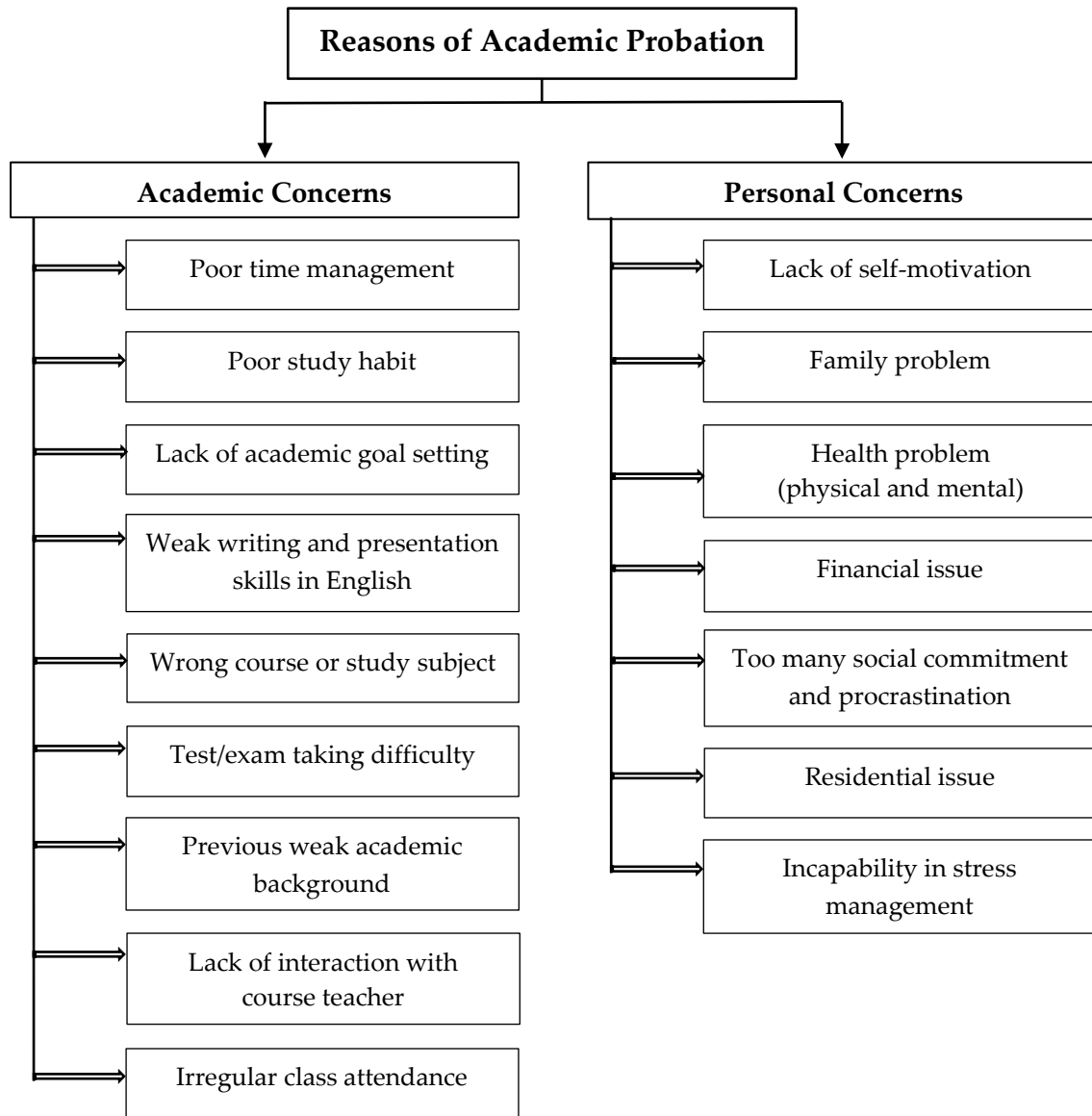


Figure 1: Reasons of academic probation identified by students

4.2 Personal concerns

The reasons causing academic probation related to personal concerns are:

4.2.1 Health problem

Research proves that a health problem, whether physical or mental is expected to adversely affect students' academic performance. Physical health problems such as an injury or illness directly prevent a student from attending classes, participating in group activities or preparing examinations which are reflected during the final grading of a particular semester. However, a mental health problem seriously affects a student's

concentration level and destroys self-motivation which are very crucial for studying and good academic performance.

4.2.2 Family problem

Family problems also cause a student to lose focus on studies, and restraint the level of motivation and determination. Family problems such as illness or death of a family member or a break-up between the parents are contributing reasons for poor academic performance. Regardless of the severity, these family problems work as a constraint towards a student's concentration and motivation in studying and eventually leading to academic probation.

4.2.3 Residential issue

Students who joined the university from outside cities and rural areas find it very difficult to adjust to their new lifestyle. For many, they have never lived outside their family and are out of their home for the very first time. Therefore, homesickness is an issue for many. In addition, the feeling of a sudden independent life and no one to monitor the mind setup of students creates an impediment to academic performance.

4.2.4 Financial issue

Several research findings showed that there is a strong connection between the academic performance and financial condition of the family of students. Students having difficulty with finance and in poor economic conditions are more likely to perform poorly compared to the students having financial solvency (Romanik, 2010). Students, in meagre economic conditions, felt more pressure and went through extra mental stress to perform badly. The extra pressure of doing well sometimes work as a boomerang and students performance tends to drop below the average.

4.2.5 Involvement with too many social activities and distractions

The more increased commitment and involvement in non-academic or social activities surely decrease the time available for academic work. As a result, the academic success rate also decreases. Courses offered in private universities are highly intensive in nature and have limited time to complete. In a three-month semester, students have to undertake three to four courses, regardless of the subject. Moreover, there are regular class tests, quizzes, course exams, term final exams, assignments, project works and presentations. If a student cannot maintain the pace with these huge workloads and perform and has too many social commitments and distractors, it is likely the student will fall into academic probation.

5. Discussions

This study discoursed the factors or reasons contributing to academic probation and identified the problems encountered by private university students in Bangladesh. The

article was focused on the students of renowned private universities in Bangladesh and analyzed students' responses with respect to different factors which cause academic probation.

According to Islam et al., (2014), poor academic performance is a serious worry and cause of frustration for students and a concern for the parents, teachers and university management. Usually, academic performance is viewed as the responsibility of the students, and therefore not as much attention is paid to this issue until the students are at risk of dropping out.

The reasons causing academic probation were separated into two categories based on students' responses. One of the categories of reasons of academic probation is academic concerns which included: poor study habits and lack of seriousness in studies; weak writing and presentation skills; difficulty in understanding the English language; previous weak academic background; difficulty with test/ exam taking; wrong course or study subject selection; poor interaction with teachers; unfamiliar with grading system; irregular in class attendance and lack of proper academic goal setting. The other category was personal concerns that include the responses like health problems; family problems; residential issues, too much involvement with unimportant and unnecessary activities, lack of self-motivation, etc.

Study skills is one of the most decisive predictors of academic performance found by earlier research as Hassanbeigi et al. (2011) discussed that to get success at the university level, students need to own a few important study skills. Failing to achieve and practice these skills end up the students on academic probation. Schmelzer et al. (1987) agreed that students with a lack of study habits, inappropriate time management, and inadequate goal setting were sufferers of academic failure.

The transition from college to university life also acts as a crucial factor of academic successes and failures for first-year students. According to Fisher and Hood (1987), the transition to university life needs the students to bring changes to their previous routines and lifestyle to a new living and study setting which includes adjusting to new social and residential changes and challenges. Failing to adjust to these changes may end up with increased mental stress, sadness, and absent-mindedness which direct the students to academic probation.

Researchers showed that students devote more time to social networking and entertainment sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, personal blogs, etc., for entertainment. Rouis et al. (2011) indicated extensive use of Facebook by students with extroverted personalities leading to poor academic performance. Keller (1978) showed that many students felt that university requirements, flawed teaching and examination procedures, residence atmosphere, knowledge in English, and the quality of academic advice can also contribute to poor academic performance. Students also found that problems in time management hampered their study performance.

Students at the university are required to manage and balance different parts of life, academic and non-academic parts. A student coming from a different academic background, having a problem with language and communication skills, and an irregular

study habit may find it harder to get academic success at the start of university life. In addition, the students who are dealing with multiple personal concerns such as physical or mental health issues, family issues, financial struggles and other non-academic issues may easily get distracted from their main focus of study and be forced to the academic probation due to poor performance.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study may provide a significant awareness of the reasons of academic probation among private university undergraduate students. The purpose of the study was not to generalize the findings for other private university students. However, the findings of this study may be similar to other students from different private universities as the reasons of academic probation are more or less similar for students. Further investigation may be conducted by increasing the number of universities and students with a diversified background in order to gain a deep understanding of the causes of academic probation. Based on the findings, necessary support programs could be designed in order to retain the number of dropout students from private universities.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Md. Solaiman Jony currently works as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Education and Research, Education School, Khulna University, Bangladesh. He has research interests on 'Secondary and Tertiary level Education system', 'Relation between Assessment and Student Learning', 'Learning and Teaching Methodology', and 'Teacher Training and Teacher Education'.

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