

## **The Relationship between Social Support and Academic Achievement**

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### **Abstract**

*Social support is an important element in students' life. It was found to be one of the factors that can influence students' academic achievement. This study was conducted to examine the relationship between social support and academic achievement. 120 undergraduate students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) were involved in this study. The Social Support Behavior (SSB) scale was used to measure the level of social support among students and the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) was used to measure students' academic achievement. Correlation coefficient was conducted to measure the relationship between social support and academic achievement. The finding of this study revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between social support and academic achievement. The result indicated that the higher the social support, the higher the academic achievement of the students. The findings of the study will be useful in assisting educators, counselors, psychologist, and researchers to develop strategies to enhance students' academic achievement.*

**Key Words:** Social support, academic achievement

### **Introduction**

Since independence, Malaysia has gone through a lot of development in its social aspects. One of them is the education system. The education system has grown and developed rapidly to cater to the demands and needs of the developing nation. Although the education system has developed across the time, the aim of the national education remains the same that is to produce high quality and professionally well-trained students. The students are equipped with a wholesome personality and strong leadership qualities so that they are capable of dealing with current and future challenges. To achieve this objective, various aspects of the students should be taken into consideration including their social life.

As far as academic is concerned, it is important to look at the roles played by the social support since it is described as both a buffer against life stressors as well as an agent promoting health and wellness (Dollete, Steese, Phillips, & Matthews, 2004). Social support refers to the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life (Gurung, 2006). It may come from different sources such as family, friends, teachers, community, or any social groups to which one is affiliated. Social support can come in the form of tangible assistance provided by others when needed which includes appraisal of different situations, effective coping strategies, and emotional support. It has long been recognized that the characteristics and quality of social support are central to the individual's adjustment. The quality of social support perceived and received has been reported by several studies to correlate more positively with mental health than the quantity of support received (e.g. Nahid & Sarkis, 1994; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1995).

There are three dimensions of support provided by family and friend i.e. warmth, behavioral control, and psychological autonomy-granting (Oswald & Suss, 1994). These three dimensions facilitate the development of positive self-conceptions and social skills, responsibility and competence, and impulse control and deterrence of deviance which in turn lead to high level of academic achievement of the students. This support has also been found necessary for healthy level of development. For example these two sources of social support, i.e. family and friends, are the predictor of individual's psychological well-being. The combination of family and friend support with acceptance and emotional warmth has been associated with higher grades in school and college, less misconduct, less psychological distress, and less delinquency among students of all social classes which would produce significant effects on adolescence academic achievement (Silbereisen & Todt, 1994).

This study will be focusing on the relationship between social support and academic achievement. The finding from this study could benefit educator by giving ideas on the importance of providing necessary support to enhance academic performance among students.

### ***Social Support and Academic Achievement***

Research on social support has shown that social support is an important factor in predicting several positive outcomes in children and adolescents. Steinberg and Darling (2005) found the relationship between social support and academic achievement of the students. They explained that social support from both family and friends influence youngsters' educational achievement and long-term educational plan. A study by Wentzel (1998) on 167 middle school students in a predominantly middle class community, social support of parents, teachers, and peers were examined for their motivational influence on students' academic and pro-social goals. Support from parents and peers had predictive value related to academic goals.

In a study by Dollete et al. (2004) about the role of peers in the motivation of teens to stay involved in students' activities and program, it was found that when teens had positive peer interactions within the context of the extra-curricular activities, they reported greater commitment and motivation toward these activities. The activities were also reported to reduce the psychological distress faced by the students. Conversely, results indicated that teens whose activities did not include strong or positive peer relationships or teens whose activities were apart from their peer groups showed lower levels of commitment and motivation toward their talent and sport activities.

There are few other studies that indicate the importance of social support from family and friend. In a study conducted by Steinberg and Darling (1994), students were asked directly about the extent to which their friends and parents encouraged them to perform well in school. For parents, the questions concerned their involvement in school activities, their performance standards, and their expectations for student's achievement. For friends, the questions concerned the degree of importance they placed on academic success and the extent to which they supported achievement among their friends. It was found that both parents and friends influence youngsters' educational achievement and long-term educational plan.

In a cross-sectional study, Holahan et al. (1995) found first-year students with higher levels of perceived parental support were better adjusted (i.e., higher well-being and happiness) and less distressed (i.e., less depression and anxiety) than those with lower levels of perceived parental support. Cutrona and colleagues (2000) examined perceived social support from parents and peers at the beginning of the first semester and GPA at the end of the following semester. Perceived parental and peer social support predicted academic adjustment after controlling for academic aptitude (i.e., college admissions test). Consistent with previous research, social support was an important protective factor that assisted students in making the transition to university. These studies support the general argument that family support contributes to high academic achievement.

Safree and adawiah (2009) conducted a study on 120 undergraduate university students to measure the social support of low and high achieving students. The results of the study indicated that that students with high social support tend to perform well in their academic as compared to students with low social support.

From the previous studies, it could be concluded that the presence of social support from family and friends could effect students' academic achievement. Supports provided by family and friend could enhance students' academic achievement. Student with high social support will have better academic achievement compared to those who have lower social support. The support received by the students could help them to perform well in academic life. By having knowledge on how social support could help students to excel in study and cope with any psychological disturbances, much information could be derived to enhance the amount of support provided.

### ***Method***

#### ***a. Participants***

The sample of this study consisted of 120 undergraduate students of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). They were selected using purposive sampling technique. Of these 120 participants, 60 (50%) were male and 60 (50%) were female. The participants were selected from various faculties. 30 (25.5%) participants were from Faculty of Engineering (ENGIN), 25 (20.8%) from Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences (KENMS), 23 (19.2%) were from Ahmad Ibrahim Faculty of Laws (AIKOL), 21 (17.5%) were from Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), 12 (10.0%) were from Faculty of Information and Technology (KICT) , and 9 (7.5%) were from Faculty of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED).

In terms of the year of study, 24 (20.1%) of the participants were first year students, 40 (33.3%) were second year students, 34 (28.3%) were third year students and 22 (18.3%) were fourth year students. The age range of the participants was 20 – 25 (mean= 2.5 (SD=1.32)). Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 120)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Respondent Characteristics</b>		
<b>1. Gender</b>		
Male	60	50
Female	60	50
<b>2. Age</b>		
20 years old	9	7.5
21 years old	15	12.5
22 years old	38	31.7
23 years old	33	27.4
24 years old	14	11.7
25 years old	11	9.2
<b>3. Faculty</b>		
ENGIN	30	25.5
KENMS	25	20.8
AIKOL	23	19.2
KIRKHS	21	17.5
KICT	12	10.0
KAED	9	7.5
<b>4. Year of Study</b>		
First year	24	20.1
Second year	40	33.3
Third year	34	28.3
Fourth year	22	18.3

#### b. Measures

The Social Support Behaviors Scale (SSB) was used to measure social support. The SSB is a 45-item instrument designed to measure social support; emotional, socializing, financial assistance, practical assistance, and advice/guidance. The SSB is designed to assess available supportive behaviors and to do so separately for family and friends. The scale applies 5-point Likert scale. The scale options are: 1 = no one would do this, 2 = someone might do this, 3 = some family member/friend would probably do this, 4 = some family member/friend would certainly do this and 5 = most family members/friends would certainly do this. The higher scores indicate higher social support. In this study, the internal consistency values were .89 for the social support from family and .79 for the social support from friends.

#### Results

Analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social support and achievement. Correlation coefficient yielded a significant positive relationship between social support and academic achievement ( $r = 0.85$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that the higher the social support, the higher the achievement. Table 2 summarizes the result of the study.

Table 2: Correlation between variables

Variables	1	2
1. Social Support	-	
2. Academic Achievement	0.85**	-

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

## **Discussion**

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between social support and academic achievement. 120 undergraduate students, both males and females were selected as participants in this study. The variables tested were gender, age, CGPA, Faculty, and level of study for demographic characteristics, while social support was tested for psychological construct. It was hypothesized that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and academic achievement among students.

The result of the study confirmed the research hypothesis. A significant positive relationship was found between social support and academic achievement in which the higher the social support, the higher academic achievement. This finding provides evidence consistent with literatures related to social support. For instance, students with high social support performed well in academic as compared to students with low social support (e.g. Selbereisen & Todt, 1994; Stainberg & Darling, 1994; Md. Aris Safree & Mariam Adawiah, 2009). This is because the existence of social support was found to increase the perception and belief of the students that necessary resources, such as advice and encouragement are there to assist them in their academic life (Cutrona, 1994). Another explanation is that students with high social support were better adjusted compared to those with lower level of social support, thus lead to high academic achievement (Holahan et al., 1995). Based on these, social support can be regarded as one of the indicators of academic achievement in which high level of social support indicates higher level of achievement.

Therefore, the findings of the present study provided evidence for the relationship between social support and academic achievement among students. The relationship between these two variables was expected as the two constructs were found to significantly correlate in the previous studies.

## **Implications of the Study**

The present study provides significant information pertaining to the importance of maximizing social support received by the students. The finding of the study clearly indicated that there exists a significant relationship between social support and academic achievement. This finding further supports the importance of social support in students' academic performance. Students and educators should realize how essential it is to ensure the availability of sufficient social support which in turn would result in a better academic performance.

The awareness of the importance of the impact of social support academic achievement will also assist the educators, counselors, and psychologist to understand to what extent the role played by the social support could help them to manage students' performance in academic life. Effort must be made to increase the amount of social support available to the students. By having knowledge and understanding on this area, it could help many parties, such as educators, counselors, and psychologist to design and develop proper intervention program to enhancing social support among students. The students themselves could benefit from the study. Information and ideas gained from this research could help them to understand the social support and its importance. Therefore, enhancing knowledge and strategies in promoting the role of family and friends as agents of social support among students may help to increase their academic achievement.

## **Conclusion**

The present study examined the relationship between social support and academic achievement among students. The results of the study were consistent with previous studies. The findings of the present study indicated that there was a significant relationship between social support and academic achievement. Therefore it can be concluded that the support received by the students either from the family and/or friends can contribute to the academic performance of the university students. It is indeed important to realize that students' performance in academic life is determined not only by academic-related matters but also the social support that they get from people around them.

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