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Inspiring Student Achievement through Astin's Theory of Involvement: A Study in a Local Higher Education Institutions Karachi, Sindh

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ABSTRACT

This study reveals the implementation of Astin's Theory of Involvement in a nearby Karachi higher education institution, illuminating the relationship between academic success and student engagement. The study looks into how students' involvement in university activities is impacted by characteristics including leadership, communication, and intrapersonal skills. Five very engaged undergraduate students were interviewed in-depth using a qualitative study design. The results demonstrate the beneficial effects of social contacts, extracurricular activities, and academic engagement on students' academic performance and personal growth. The study provides insights for educators and organizations looking to improve student accomplishment by highlighting the applicability of Astin's theory in creating a thorough and rewarding educational experience.

Keywords: Astin's Theory of Involvement, student engagement, academic

achievement, extracurricular involvement, higher education Institution, skills development.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of academic achievement has expanded beyond the confines of traditional classrooms in the dynamic field of higher education. Educators and academics explore holistic theories that smoothly combine academic, social, and personal components, emphasizing the varied nature of student performance. In this context, Alexander Astin's Theory of Involvement is one prominent framework. Astin's hypothesis represents a noteworthy advancement in our comprehension of the complex dynamics that lead to academic achievement for students. It acknowledges that academic success is intricately linked to the larger experiences and engagements student have throughout their educational journey and is not only the result of their efforts in the classroom.

Developed by Astin, this theory underscores the significance of student engagement in both academic and co-curricular activities for their intellectual and personal growth (Ohochukwu, 2018). This theory underscores the idea that a student's commitment, participation, and investment of time and energy in various aspects of university life significantly influence their overall success and satisfaction. Astin's perspective encourages a holistic approach to education, emphasizing the interconnectedness of academic and non-academic factors in shaping the educational experience. In the context of contemporary higher education, where the demands on students extend beyond traditional academic pursuits, Astin's Theory of Involvement offers a relevant framework to explore the varied dimensions of student achievement. It prompts a shift in perspective, encouraging educators and researchers to consider the diverse factors that contribute to a student's sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. By promoting and understanding student involvement, the theory has the potential to enhance success and retention in higher education. It posits that the extent of student engagement profoundly influences the overall educational experience, transcending national borders and gaining applicability in diverse cultural settings.

Astin's Theory of Involvement has found application in various higher education studies. Ohochukwu's exploration of co-curricular involvement in first-year students aligns with Astin's theory, investigating its impact on academic and personal development (Ohochukwu, 2018). Similarly, a phenomenological study delved into undergraduate students' over-involvement, potentially connecting to Astin's theory and its implications for engagement and development (Couch, 2016). Additionally, research on teaching conceptions in applied higher education institutions referenced Astin's theory, highlighting its relevance in understanding practitioners' role in linking theory and practice for student learning (Revaa et al., 2014).

In a globalized world where graduates must navigate diverse challenges and contribute meaningfully to society, this research's findings can shape educational practices and policies in Pakistan. By illuminating the specific ways in which

involvement influences student achievement in this cultural context, the study provides insights to enhance higher education quality and contribute to holistic student development in Pakistan.

Measuring student involvement presents challenges, as it encompasses diverse activities and experiences that may resist easy quantification (Crust, 1998). Defining involvement proves equally challenging, as it hinges on context and the individual student's perspective. Scholars have pointed out the contextual limitations of Astin's Theory of Involvement, developed within a specific institutional setting (Xueying, 2019). While generally considered positive, excessive involvement may lead to adverse effects, including burnout and diminished academic performance (Couch, 2016). Despite these challenges, researchers persist in exploring Astin's Theory of Involvement in higher education, aiming to comprehend its potential to enhance student success and retention across various educational contexts.

The aim of studying Astin's Theory of Involvement in Higher Education remains towards the implication of student engagement in academic and co-curricular activities for their individual and academic growth. This participation is thought to subsidize to amended student success and retention in higher education institutions (Ohochukwu, 2018). Astin's Theory emphasizes the importance of student participation in diverse activities for overall development and success in higher education. The study focuses on applying Astin's Theory of Involvement within a specific educational context, aiming to elucidate how student engagement leads to personal and intellectual development, ultimately fostering improved success and retention (Taylor, 2019). It also holds the potential to guide institutions seeking to enhance student achievement through the application of Astin's Theory of Involvement. The research endeavors to explore the correlation between student involvement and academic achievement, employing Astin's Theory of Involvement. Additionally, it aims to scrutinize students' traits, including leadership, communication, and intrapersonal skills, and their influence on university activity participation.

This investigation delves into the implications of Astin's theory within the context of a local higher education institution in Pakistan. In a landscape where cultural, societal, and educational dynamics converge, the examination of Astin's Theory of Involvement takes on critical significance. As the demand for holistic education beyond academic proficiency rises, understanding the role of student engagement becomes imperative for institutions striving to provide a comprehensive and enriching educational experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

[Judith Ohochukwu](#) in their study's highlights the significance of student participation in academic and co-curricular activities, such as clubs, organizations, and community service, for their overall development and success in higher education. The findings argue that a student's chance of getting involved may depend on a few different circumstances, and students need participate for an average of 0–2 hours per week to feel like they belong. It emphasizes the connection between

student involvement and personal growth, as well as the development of intellectual skills and knowledge (Ohochukwu, 2018).

Jessica Taylor, in her study, analyzed success of college student using structural equation modeling and explored that the implementation student involvement strategies can lead to improved student achievement, retention, and overall success in higher education institutions (Taylor, 2019).

Goldman, Goodboy, & and Bolkan (2016) provide insights into the impact of out-of-class communication on students' learning effects, which could be related to the concept of student involvement and its influence on academic achievement. Understanding how students' communication outside the classroom contributes to their learning can complement the findings of the study on student involvement and academic achievement (Goldman et al., 2016).

Jones and Abes (2010) discuss the nature and uses of theory in the context of student services, which can provide a broader understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of studies related to student development and academic achievement. It may offer insights into the application of theoretical frameworks, including Astin's Theory of Involvement, in understanding and supporting students' holistic development (Jones & Abes, 2010).

Schuh, Jones and Harper (2010) provide a comprehensive overview of student services, including theoretical perspectives and practical applications. It may offer insights into the broader context of student development and the role of student services in supporting students' academic achievement and overall well-being. Understanding the theoretical foundations and practical implications of student services can complement the study's focus on student involvement and academic achievement (Schuh et al., 2010).

There are several studies that have explored different aspects of student involvement and its impact. The following studies provide insights into the application of the theory. For instance, Susan L. Crust in their graduate thesis explored the application of Astin's Theory in the context of study abroad programs, focusing on student involvement and its impact on the study abroad experience (Crust, 1998). A study explored the application of Astin's Theory in an overseas study program in France, emphasizing on student involvement and its impact on the study abroad experience. Extracurricular activities and habitation happiness, overall program satisfaction and housing satisfaction, and extracurricular activity and overall program contentment are examples of these connections. These studies collectively contribute to the understanding of the various dimensions of student involvement in higher education and orientation with Astin's Theory of Involvement. They address different aspects such as study abroad experiences, over-involvement, and the impact of co-curricular activities on student development, providing valuable insights into the application of the theory in diverse educational contexts.

Research Questions

The study aims to explore the following research questions:

1. How does being actively involved at the undergraduate level influence the academic achievements of undergraduate students?

2. To what extent do traits such as leadership, communication, and intrapersonal skills contribute to and shape students' involvement in various university activities and programs?

Statement of Problem

The contemporary landscape of higher education underscores the critical importance of understanding and optimizing factors that contribute to student success. In this context, the article seeks to address the overarching problem of deciphering the intricate relationship between student involvement and academic achievement. The study recognizes the need to delve into the dynamics of student engagement, particularly drawing upon Astin's Theory of Involvement, to discern its impact on academic outcomes within a local higher education institution Karachi. While Astin's Theory of Involvement provides a comprehensive framework for understanding student engagement, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge base by exploring how various traits and characteristics among students, including but not limited to leadership, communication, and intrapersonal skills, influence and are influenced by their participation in diverse activities and programs at the university. The study endeavors to offer valuable insights into the intricate relationship between student engagement, personal attributes, and academic success. This exploration is vital for advancing our theoretical comprehension of student involvement and guiding practical strategies for higher education institutions to cultivate a supportive and enriching learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

The chosen research design for this study is qualitative, aiming to explore and understand the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate students in Karachi regarding their involvement in various university-level activities and their impact on academic achievement. The primary data collection method is in-depth interviews, which allows for a detailed exploration of individual experiences.

Sample Size

The study selected a targeted sample size of 5 undergraduate students from Karachi who exhibit high levels of activity and hold significant positions within various university-level programs. This purposive sampling approach focuses on participants who not only meet the criteria of active involvement but also contribute significantly to the university community.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the selected participants met the specific criteria of being highly active and holding positions in various university-level programs. This method allows for the intentional selection of participants who can provide rich and detailed insights into the relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic success.

Data Collection

The primary data collection technique utilized in this study is in-depth qualitative interviews. These interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perspectives, allowing for the exploration of nuanced

details related to their involvement and academic achievement. The face-to-face nature of the interviews enhances rapport and encourages participants to express their thoughts openly. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in a one-on-one setting, creating a conducive environment for participants to share their personal experiences. The use of open-ended questions facilitated the exploration of diverse aspects of the relationship between extracurricular involvement and academic success.

The decision to conduct face-to-face interviews was based on the belief that personal interactions would yield more in-depth and authentic responses. Additionally, this approach allowed for the capture of non-verbal cues, contributing to a more holistic understanding of participants' perspectives. The interview sessions were recorded to ensure an accurate representation of participants' responses and to facilitate the subsequent analysis of the data. The combination of qualitative research design, purposive sampling, and in-depth interviews aims to provide a detailed and insightful exploration of the experiences and perspectives of actively involved undergraduate students in Karachi concerning their academic achievements.

Data Analysis

To scrutinize the collected data, this study judiciously adopted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as a methodological approach, was employed to meticulously identify, systematically analyze, and judiciously report discernible patterns within the dataset. This analytical method serves as a robust framework for unraveling the intricate tapestry of students' experiences and perspectives about their engagement in extracurricular activities and its correlation with academic achievement. By embracing thematic analysis, the research aimed to illuminate the underlying themes and recurrent motifs, offering a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between students' involvement and their academic success.

Ethical Guidelines

Adherence to stringent ethical guidelines is paramount in any scholarly endeavor, and this study was no exception. The ethical considerations were diligently addressed by obtaining explicit informed consent from all participants, underscoring the voluntary nature of their participation. The study took measures to uphold the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, safeguarding the identity and personal information of the participants. Before commencing the research, ethical approval was meticulously sought and obtained from the pertinent institutional review board, ensuring that the study adhered to the highest ethical standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected suggest that there are various factors that influence the performances of undergraduate students such as academic engagement, extracurricular involvement, and social interactions.

Academic Engagement

The active participation of students in academic activities positively correlates with improved learning outcomes and a deeper understanding of course materials. The interviews consistently highlighted that active participation in academic

activities positively correlates with improved learning outcomes and a deeper understanding of course materials. This aligns with Astin's assertion that engagement in the learning process enhances the overall educational experience. The verbatim quote emphasizes the transformative impact of academic involvement, not only on cognitive development but also on the development of self-efficacy and confidence. Shahzeb, a 20-year-old undergraduate student mentioned:

"Being actively involved in class discussions and group projects not only improved my understanding but also boosted my confidence."

Laqeeqa reflected:

"I noticed a significant difference in my academic performance when I actively engaged in coursework. It wasn't just about attending lectures; it was about participating, asking questions, and challenging my own understanding."

The statement echoes Astin's emphasis on active involvement in academic pursuits. Academic engagement, as articulated by the participant, extends beyond passive attendance, emphasizing the transformative impact of active participation. This aligns with Astin's assertion that students who actively engage with course content are more likely to internalize knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. In the Pakistani higher education context, where traditional teaching methods often prioritize rote learning, the importance of active engagement becomes particularly pertinent. The verbatim quote suggests that a shift towards encouraging students to actively participate in the learning process can lead to a more dynamic and intellectually stimulating educational environment. Sufyan, a shared:

"I've observed that students who engage in research projects or collaborative initiatives not only deepen their understanding of the subject matter but also develop a passion for the discipline."

The involvement in academic activities contributes not only to knowledge acquisition but also to the development of a passion for the subject. This finding has implications for curriculum design and teaching methodologies in Pakistani higher education institutions. Encouraging students to actively engage in research projects, group discussions, and collaborative initiatives can foster a sense of ownership over their education. This resonates with Astin's theory, which posits that students who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning are more likely to invest effort and time in academic pursuits, resulting in improved achievement. Labeeqa, an undergraduate student, remarked:

"The courses where the professors encouraged us to connect theoretical concepts with real-world applications were the ones where I felt the most engaged. It made me realize the practical relevance of what I was learning."

Creating learning experiences that highlight the real-world applicability of academic concepts not only enhances student engagement but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In the context of Pakistani higher education, where there is a growing emphasis on producing graduates who can apply

theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges, the integration of practical elements into the curriculum becomes crucial. This aligns with Astin's assertion that academic engagement goes beyond theoretical comprehension and involves the application of knowledge in meaningful contexts.

The research findings reported that actively involved students reported positive experiences, including gaining various soft skills, effective time management, and improved academic performance as a result of their active involvement in university programs. Labeeqa, also a vice president of the student council, mentioned that the communication skills of teachers are one of the most important features that encourage student involvement in academics. She stated:

“My favorite teacher is very strict, but then at the same time, he makes you learn things that come to your mind. So that is the best classroom experience. And he has a lot of examples to give.”

Similarly, Maria mentioned that the teachers who lack communication skills make the academic courses uninteresting and dry. She stated:

“My management teacher comes and turns on the slides on the projectors and after that, most of the class sleeps with open eyes. This makes it hard to understand and hate that course.”

Active participation, a shift toward practical applications, and the development of a passion for learning emerge as key components that contribute to enhanced academic achievement. As institutions in Pakistan strive to create a learning environment that prepares students for the complexities of the modern world, Astin's theory provides valuable insights into the pedagogical strategies that can be employed to foster academic engagement and, consequently, elevate student achievement.

Extracurricular Involvement

The study found that students' involvement in co-curricular and development programs at the university led to positive changes in their academic performance and overall development. Sufyan shared:

“Being part of the debate club not only improved my public speaking skills but also boosted my self-confidence. It was an extracurricular activity, but the impact spilled over into my academic performance.”

Sufyan's reflection aligns with Astin's assertion that extracurricular involvement contributes to a broad spectrum of skills and attributes beyond the academic domain. His views highlight the interconnectedness of extracurricular activities and academic success, suggesting that participation in such activities can positively influence personal development and, consequently, academic achievement. In the context of Pakistani higher education, where the demand for well-rounded graduates is on the rise, the integration of extracurricular activities into the academic landscape gains significance. This not only enhances the overall student experience but also aligns with Astin's theory by promoting a holistic approach to education. A student, a high-achiever and active in co-curricular activities, mentioned that co-curricular activities enable students to learn and experience the things taught in classrooms beforehand. He stated:

“The students who are active in co-curricular activities have broader lens and worldview than those who are not.”

A student also mentioned that outdoor activities impact their academic achievement and personal development. She stated:

“I have seen in my class that the students who are active tend to be more efficiently do their semester and projects than those who are not.”

Maria noted:

“Students engaged in community service projects often exhibit a heightened sense of social responsibility. This commitment spills over into their academic work, fostering a deeper understanding of societal issues.

Her observation underscores Astin's contention that involvement in extracurricular activities, particularly those with a social or community-oriented focus, contributes to a sense of social responsibility. It also shapes socially conscious and responsible citizens. In the Pakistani context, where societal challenges are multifaceted, the verbatim quote suggests that integrating community service into the educational experience not only benefits the community but also enhances students' academic engagement. Astin's theory, which emphasizes the integration of academic and extracurricular experiences, aligns with the idea that engagement in activities with a social impact can enrich students' understanding of the real-world implications of their academic knowledge. Naveen, an undergraduate student shared

“Being part of a sports team taught me about teamwork, discipline, and goal-setting. These qualities translated into my academic life, helping me manage my time efficiently.”

His reflection highlights the transferability of skills acquired through extracurricular involvement to the academic domain. Astin's Theory of Involvement posits that engagement in diverse activities contributes to the development of transferable skills that are valuable beyond the specific context of the activity. In the Pakistani higher education landscape, where the development of soft skills is increasingly recognized as crucial for career success, the integration of sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities aligns with Astin's theory. By providing students with opportunities to develop skills such as teamwork and discipline, institutions can contribute to a more comprehensive and enriching educational experience.

The interconnectedness of extracurricular activities and academic success, the promotion of social responsibility, and the development of transferable skills collectively support the idea that a holistic education, as advocated by Astin's theory, can contribute to enhanced student achievement. Institutions in Pakistan can leverage these insights to design and implement initiatives that integrate extracurricular activities into the educational experience, fostering a well-rounded and capable generation of graduates.

Saira noted:

“Students engaged in clubs and societies demonstrate better time management and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for their future success.

Involvement in extracurricular activities fosters the development of essential life skills, contributing to holistic student development. Extracurricular involvement

emerged as a significant factor contributing to student achievement. The interviewee's observation underscores the importance of holistic skill development beyond the academic realm. Participation in clubs and societies not only enhances time management skills but also fosters interpersonal skills, which are essential for success in both academic and professional spheres. This finding supports Astin's notion that involvement extends beyond the classroom and contributes to broader personal and professional growth.

Social Interaction

The findings of the study suggest that Astin's Theory of Involvement is highly relevant to local higher education institutions in Pakistan. Participants reported that involvement in extracurricular activities, engagement with faculty members, and interaction with peers were all positively related to their academic achievement. They also reported that involvement had a positive impact on their motivation, academic self-confidence, and learning outcomes. However, participants also reported that there were barriers to involvement, including lack of resources, cultural norms, and institutional policies.

Social engagement plays a crucial role in creating a positive learning environment and fostering a sense of belonging, which enhances motivation and achievement. Social interactions were consistently highlighted as crucial contributors to student achievement. The formation of supportive relationships within the academic community emerged as a motivating factor for students to excel. Astin's theory, emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment, finds resonance in the experiences shared by the participants. The verbatim quote underscores the role of social engagement in fostering a sense of belonging and motivation, which are integral components of the theory.

Zain articulated,

"Forming study groups with classmates helped me grasp challenging concepts. It wasn't just about individual effort; it was the collaborative learning environment that made a significant difference."

The student's insight aligns with Astin's emphasis on the social aspect of learning. The verbatim quote underscores the importance of collaborative and interactive learning environments, suggesting that social interactions play a pivotal role in academic achievement. This resonates with Astin's assertion that learning is a social process, and students who engage with their peers in meaningful ways are more likely to succeed academically. In the Pakistani higher education context, where traditional teaching methods often prioritize individual learning, the verbatim quote suggests that promoting collaborative learning environments could enhance the overall educational experience. Astin's theory supports the idea that fostering social interactions in academic settings contributes to a more vibrant and effective learning environment.

Huzifa noted

"I've observed that students who actively participate in student organizations or cultural events develop a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging positively impacts their academic engagement and overall satisfaction."

The role of social interactions in creating a sense of belonging within the academic community. Astin's Theory of Involvement posits that a sense of belonging is a key factor in student success. The verbatim quote suggests that students who feel connected to their academic community are more likely to be engaged in their studies and experience higher levels of satisfaction. In the context of Pakistani higher education, where the transition to university life can be challenging for students, fostering a sense of belonging becomes crucial. Institutions can draw on Astin's theory to design initiatives that promote social interactions, such as student organizations and cultural events, to create a supportive and inclusive academic environment. Sufyan shared:

"Building relationships with professors through office hours and informal interactions made me feel more comfortable seeking guidance. This personal connection positively impacted my academic journey."

In the Pakistani higher education landscape, where hierarchical structures can sometimes create barriers between students and faculty, the verbatim quote suggests that fostering personal connections could enhance the overall educational experience. Astin's theory, which emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships, supports the notion that creating a supportive academic community involves not only peer interactions but also meaningful connections with faculty.

CONCLUSIONS

The emphasis on collaborative learning environments, a sense of belonging, and personal connections with faculty members contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social interactions on academic achievement. These themes, along with academic engagement, extracurricular involvement, and social interaction, collectively offer a holistic view of factors influencing student achievement.

The study investigated the relationship between students' active involvement at university and its influence on academic achievement, providing insights into the potential impact on outcomes. These findings reflect the positive effects of student involvement on academic achievement and personal development, aligning with Astin's Theory of Involvement. The study highlights the interconnectedness of academic and non-academic factors in shaping students' educational journeys, suggesting a crucial role for student involvement in academic success and personal development.

The focus on exploring the relationship between student involvement and academic achievement provides valuable insights for educators and advisors to develop strategies supporting students' participation in co-curricular and development programs. This, in turn, can contribute to their academic success and overall well-being. Institutions in Pakistan can leverage these insights to design targeted strategies that promote meaningful social interactions, creating an inclusive and supportive academic environment aligned with Astin's theory, fostering an environment conducive to academic success and personal growth.

Recommendation

Student involvement plays a crucial role in academic achievement and personal development. Educators and advisors must encourage student involvement, Foster Student-Faculty Relationships, Emphasize Soft Skills Development, and Provide a Supportive Ecosystem. Taking these steps can inform educators and advisors in developing strategies to support students' involvement in co-curricular and development programs, which can contribute to their academic success and overall well-being.

Limitation

The small sample size of the study limits the generalizability of the study's findings to a larger population. The study focused only on undergraduate students from Karachi who are actively involved in various activities and programs at the university. This limited scope may not reflect the experiences and perspectives of other student populations. The study was qualitative and may quantitative study generalize and involve more data on students' academic involvement, due to qualitative requirements limits the ability to draw statistical conclusions about the relationship between student involvement and academic achievement.

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