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The Impact of Work and Family Responsibilities on the Academic Performance of Part-Time Postgraduate Students in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

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Abstract

This qualitative research paper aimed at investigating the issues that part-time postgraduate students have in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, in balancing school academic commitments, work responsibilities and family commitments. Overall results of this research, based on in-depth interviews with male and female students who take evening postgraduate courses, reveal the effects of competing demands on academic achievement, affective well-being and situations of role negotiation. The results indicated that although both sexes had to face the problem of role conflict, women had much more pressure to face since gender expectations are culturally reinforced. Family support became an important issue that either empowered or limited the student to advance in education due to family culture regarding roles and responsibilities. Emotional burnout, managing time, and lack of institutional support to maintain performance were cited as some of the main barriers to success by many of the participants. The paper utilised the role conflict theory to explain how duplication of roles created both internal stress and external stress on the individuals, with implications on the schools and even policy makers, as well as parents. It suggests that the flexible academic policies, workplace accommodations, and culturally sensitive support systems are crucial to enhance the academic performance of students in the case of dual or triple roles.

Keywords: Work-study balance, family responsibilities, part-time students, gender roles, academic performance, role conflict, higher education, Pakistan.

Introduction

The balancing of school, work, and family has been widely recognised as a cause of much stress among adult students. As Tight (2019) points out, pupils have some distinctive issues as compared to standard full-time pupils because of the two or three roles of the adults. All these competing needs tend to reduce the



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level of engagement in academic activities, and this can ultimately affect academic performance. With the lack of institutional flexibility, the author added that the part-time students are more likely to struggle academically. Students working at the postgraduate level must face constant challenges of organising their time to balance between professional, family and growing academic demands. The research project pointed out some of the challenges that such students face, including time poverty, overloaded roles, and emotional fatigue, which negatively affect their academic achievements. The author proposed that colleges should adopt more responsive measures, including deadlines and a mix of hybrid learning types to reduce such burdens (Edwards, 2014).

Academic issues of adult students with children. They discovered that family roles, especially parenting, seriously deteriorated the academic performance because there was more time pressure and emotional labour. The study noted that these students required specific support services that could slow down the attrition rates of these students, including childcare and counselling (Rhijn et al., 2016). Identity conflict arises when the adult learners are handling work, study and family. The research has found that the psychological pressure and the loss of academic performance were usually caused by the incongruent role pressures generated by the employers, family, and educational establishments. The adults had problems with the technique of belonging in an academic environment, and their outside expectations often hurt their confidence and endurance (Kasworm, 2010). Gender roles in the family, absolved of gender-based expectations, seriously impacted female students who had to juggle family and academic life. The women were supposed to give their time to domestic activities rather than learning, hence leading to a low level of academic performance, as there were no systems to support them. The authors emphasized that a huge role in correcting this imbalance belongs to gender-sensitive education policies (Asia et al., 2017).

In addition to the positive impact of place flexibility on helping students. The results indicated that employer support had a significant impact, e.g. students with employer support, like shorter working hours, study leaves, or monetary aids, usually did very well in academics as compared to those without employer support. This aid helped reduce the conflict that existed between roles and allowed for better management of time to deal with academic work (Richardson et al., 2012). Among the students taking part-time studies and balancing work and family life, there is more stress and disengagement with academics. Family and peer characteristics were found to serve as burnout buffers, regardless of whether those aspects were emotional, social, or supportive (Stone & OShea, 2013).

The research emphasised the role of peer mentoring and friendly university policies toward families, which would potentially affect academic retention and success. The term work-family conflict emerges in the situation of incompatible work and family roles, which are accompanied by stress and performance deficiencies. The same theory has been extensively used on the student population, in which sharing roles among them also leads to fatigue, scheduling conflicts, and poor academic performance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).



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Research Objectives

Based on the review of literature, the following objectives were formulated:

1. To identify the lived experiences of part-time postgraduate students in the workplace, family and education.
2. To find out the most widespread problems that these students experience regarding their willingness to achieve satisfactory academic results.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, part-time postgraduate students were constantly assuming the concurrent responsibility to achieve academic growth, jobs, and play family roles. These people in Rawalpindi found themselves constantly trying to juggle between work obligations, academic demands, and social or family roles. This disparity could impinge on their studies, psychological conditions, and well-being. There was some quantitative research available, but even so, there was minimal qualitative research carried out to investigate such challenges as seen through the students' eyes.

Significance of the Study

The present study proved to be an eye-opener on both the realities and intricacies of part-time postgraduate students in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. It brought up the various issues that are a result of balancing traditions, academic, career and family roles. The paper filled that gap by encompassing the lived experiences of such students to gain a deeper picture of how the intersection of work and family life affected their academic experience and what coping strategies these students developed in order to deal with these stressors. The results added value to the body of knowledge because they indicated the existence of personal and institutional determinants of academic success. In addition, the research provided suggestions that may guide college officials and planners in building more sensitive academic and services to assist adult students who have multiple roles.

Review of Literature

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined work-family conflict as a type of inter-role conflict where work and family pressures are incompatible. Their paper had explained how competing demands may cause tension in both spheres, which paved the way for further research that covered the multidimensional role of such confounding factors in many areas of life, such as the pursuit of education. Allen et al. (2000) investigated the effects of work-family conflict, and the findings indicated that work stress often found its way into the family life and caused a rise in psychological distress. In their review, they had highlighted that this distress may affect the overall performance of an individual in various areas, including academic requirements, especially for those who must juggle between school, work and family demands.

Voydanoff (2005) examined the circularity of work, family, and community settings, in which there are no one-directional connections among such spheres. His work had noted that people who attended higher education with full-time work and family life could undergo other types of stresses, and this may influence their studies as well as their well-being. Andrew Frone (2003) pushed the discussion to the larger issue of work-family balance and how a lack



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of balance in this situation had the propensity to lower academic output among adult students. The author had concluded that unless there was proper assistance or flexible policies at the institutional level, the critical mass of all these roles could have an adverse influence on the educational outcomes, which necessitated intervention by more sensitive policies.

Butts et al. (2003) researched the conflicts between work and family roles in employed parents and revealed that the two commitments often played a significant role in reducing attention to education. Their study presented real-life data on how the absence of proper separation of roles could contribute towards increased stress and, consequently, poor academic performance. Warner and Little (2002) draw attention to the interaction between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion. Their results revealed that emotional depletion due to the multi-verbal demands was one of the strong predictors of losing academic engagement in students. This article highlighted the reason why emotional well-being should be part of the academic performance of working postgraduates. A culturally insightful perspective was observed by Haudhry and Javed (2010), which evaluated the issues of work-life balance in Pakistani workers. The qualitative research they conducted described how roles in a traditional family and changing expectations of professionals in Pakistan frequently enhanced or coupled with the pressures of continuing to perform well in academia. Their study indicated that the cultural aspects were also important in determining the experiences of people managing these roles.

Rashid and Ali (2015) had particularly targeted the topic of academic issues faced by Pakistani working postgraduate students. In their work, it was found that dual responsibilities of work and family leave people with limited time and put them in cognitive overload that compromises academic work in many situations. Their results emphasised the necessity of institutional changes that would address the specific needs of part-time learners. The study by Qureshi and Ahmed (2018) examined how family obligations may affect the performance of students taking part-time post-graduate studies. In their study, they were able to prove that the strength and the fluctuation of family responsibilities directly affected daily study habits and educational performances. This study has shed some light on the possible support strategies that may be a remedy to these challenges, such as flexibility in scheduling.

The authors, Iqbal and Ali (2020), had in their study investigated how adult learners in an urban context of Pakistan coped with multiple demands on their time at work, family, and school. They found that students had used different coping strategies, although they still found themselves in serious problems trying to sustain academics. They outlined the need to have institutional and societal assistance in reducing the burden of multi-role bearing by these persons.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework informed the design, data collection, and analysis part of the study by directing the researcher to pay attention to the expression of the tension between external obligations and academic pressures in the academic lives of the students under study. As presented in the conceptual framework of the current research, the framework illustrates how work and family responsibilities can be viewed as the most potent factors of influence on the



academic performances of part-time postgraduate students. Being simultaneously professionally and family oriented, these students are virtually required to balance their university education and professional/family commitments, which often can be extremely difficult to achieve. Job requirements, i.e., working overtime, tight deadlines, and work-related pressure, are direct factors that hinder the student's focus on studies. These requirements tend to decrease the time and brain power that one must study, attend classes, or fulfil assignments. In the same way, family duties such as taking care of children, managing the household, and acting as parents can reduce the time students can spend on academics due to the added emotional and physical strain. This convergence of roles frequently results in role conflict, time poverty and psychological strain. In turn, these are serious factors affecting academic achievement, grades, course completion, and overall performance. The framework places the academic performance as the dependent variable influenced by the two stressors of work and family roles. Creating a central dramatic pivot on these players are part-time postgraduate students who negotiate this grand interplay of obligations. As indicated by the diagram, the relationship is unidirectional in the sense that not only does work have an impact on academic performance, but also vice versa, and family role plays a direct role in directing academic performance as well, which undoubtedly presents an apt way to study lived experiences and coping mechanisms of these adult learners.

Conceptual Framework

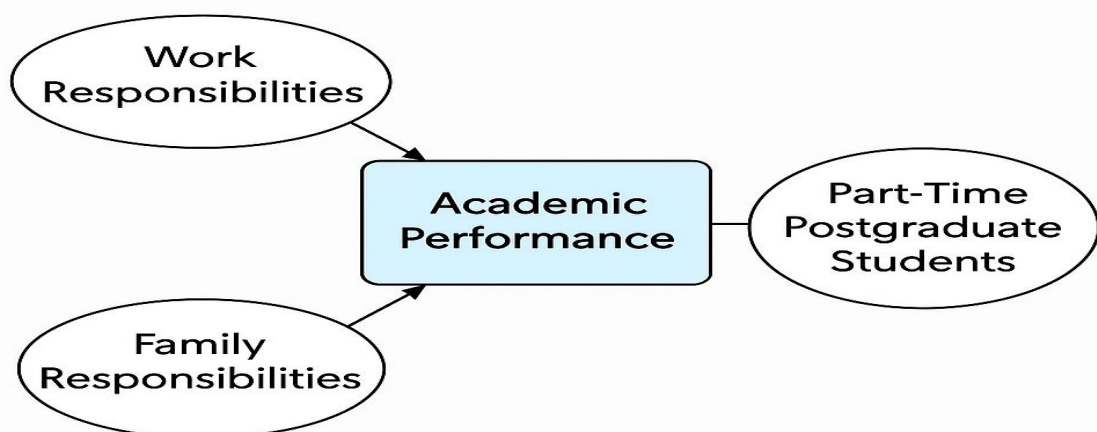


Figure 2.1: Generated by the Researcher

Theoretical Framework

This research was informed by the application of Work-Family Conflict Theory, as conceptualized by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), which helps to unambiguously describe how work and family can create a conflict, which in turn, negatively affects the involved performance of the roles. The theory is based on the principle that human beings have limited emotional, cognitive and physical resources, and when more than one role consumes them simultaneously,



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dysfunction and stress are bound to occur in the context of part-time postgraduate students, time, energy and attention often become stretched to a triangular hybrid between work commitments, family responsibilities and academic obligations. The interference caused by this role is also likely to occur in the form of psychological distress, fatigue, and reduced time for academic pursuits, ultimately resulting in a negative impact on academic performance. The Work-Family Conflict Theory that Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) developed was adopted as the major theoretical perspective through which the experiences of the participants were to be analysed. The theory identifies three influences of conflict: Time-based conflict (when the time spent on one activity reduces the time spent on another), strain-based (when time-related pressure related to doing one activity leads to a pressure in another), and behaviour-based conflict (when the behaviour expected to be used in one role is incompatible with that expected to be used in another). To complement this, Role Strain Theory by Goode (1960) is also used to bring in the relevance of the multiplicity of roles as being the leading cause of tension and lack of performance. This theory touches on the strain that occurs when there is a mismatch between the expectations of the different roles that an individual plays, and the individual struggles to fulfil their roles effectively in all spheres. Part-time students often lose motivation and spend more time on academic work or drop out due to attending to other responsibilities, especially in careers and family life. The term role overload was very applicable in explaining the lived experiences of participants in the current study since it refers to the situation that arises when a person is overwhelmed by several roles and cannot cope with all of them efficiently. Using this framework, the research systematically analysed how part-time postgraduate students in Rawalpindi overcame inter-role tensions, prioritised competing responsibilities, and developed both institutional and personal coping mechanisms to continue performing academically. This theoretical approach only explained the nature of both structural and personal issues that affected the academic performance of students. However, it also provided insight into strategizing and adjusting behaviours that arose in response to a need to cope with such stresses.

Methods and Procedure

The design used in this study is a qualitative phenomenological research design, which was used in investigating the lived experiences of part-time postgraduate students. The sample was composed of part-time postgraduate students who were pursuing postgraduate studies at PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi. The research relied on purposive sampling to select 20 participants currently employed with family responsibilities, including being married, taking care of children, or caring for the elderly. The selected participants were used in semi-structured in-depth interviews. The themes to be explored included academic pressure, work stress, family roles, and time management. An interview guide was prepared. The participants were interviewed with their consent, and their responses were typed down after the interviews. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify themes and patterns that recur in the data. The themes were classified according to challenges, coping mechanisms and the ways by which the institution supported them under the transcribed interviews, which were coded manually. The consent of all the participants was taken, and they were informed. Confidentiality was granted to anonymise identities. The



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participants were told that they could quit the study at any time and that they would not be penalised.

Results and Discussion

The experiences of postgraduate students in Rawalpindi indicated that there were significant hurdles in balancing work, study, and family responsibilities. The central theme to be revealed was the emotional and physical burden present in balancing these roles that compound upon each other. The main issue to the participants was that their workplaces are inflexible. Long hours of work, unfriendly supervisors and lack of study leave were some of the reasons mentioned by many. One of the respondents said that his supervisor fails to comprehend his academic responsibilities. I feel that I do not have the energy to study after 10 10-hour working days, but I cannot quit one of these responsibilities. Such difficulties required students to juggle multiple priorities at the expense of academic concentration regularly. Investigations were perhaps most acutely impacted by the students working in industry, either at all, or working increased hours, or working in shift-based jobs, as these students missed appointments, tutorials, or failed to drop assignments on time. According to one of the participants, my job schedule conflicts with my classes. I request to be flexible, and I am told that I must prioritize between work and studies. Such limitations resulted in fatigue, lack of concentration, and spurts in grades. This is in concurrence with Kasworm (2003), who opined that adult learners simultaneously pursuing university education and careers experience added pressure. Gouthro (2006) has added that these learners are likely to fail to get institutionalised support, hence they need a high-level coping strategy to excel. Balancing of time was a consistent fight as well. The respondents used to have late-night study sessions and no rest. As one student stated, unlike full-time students, he cannot spend the best hours of his studies. When I work on a chair, I am already tired in the mind." Such restrictions had direct effects on grades and general academic performance. McAlpine and Amundsen (2011) noted that postgraduate students experience tensions between academic and personal roles, which can lead to subpar performance. There was an extra burden on the students who had family responsibilities, especially female students. Individuals who were part of the collective family arrangement, as well as those who had children, stated that the expectations within the domestic setting did not change in any case. One respondent exclaimed. My family is telling me to continue to study, and the same amount of contribution is expected at home. This can be attributed to Kember (2004), who found that under strain, students develop ineffective learning strategies that are more like surface strategies to deal with the situation. Most of the students reported that employment had a detrimental impact on their studies. The usual outcome was less studying time, submission tardiness and dodging of complex subjects. One participant acknowledged that she took easier courses because she could not endure the pressure, not because she lacked the ability to do it. The rest also missed seminars and teamwork due to fatigue or other issues, contributing to low self-esteem. These trends agree with Misra et al., (2000), who have reported that working students have a higher amount of academic stress and institutional empathy. Such are the students who do not have much flexibility on the part of employers, as well as assistance on the part of education institutions and families, leading to them continuing to face



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these challenges and eventually excel in their much-needed performance. The respondents always mentioned that it is very complicated to balance work, studies, and family matters. Although some students had stated they are aiming to achieve balance, most of them have recognised that there was at least one area that they were neglecting regularly. According to one of the respondents, it is a juggling act. Sometimes I am studying, and then I am out with the family. Something goes wrong all the time.” Another said the same thing: there is no ideal balance. One day it is the assignments and another day it is a family event, making up for missing it. The most common area that parents must sacrifice is their family time, closely followed by academic matters, especially when the professional situations are intense. Individuals who had the flexibility in their work schedules stated it as another challenge always to apply quality time to all areas. The common had been that trade-offs were unavoidable, and the endeavouring to make roles balanced ended up draining emotions and leading to reduced academic interest. These are very illustrative of the values of Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), especially time-based conflict, whereby time spent in one is a direct loss to another one (Greenhaus, 1985). Students working full-time or shift jobs, particularly those working more than eight hours per day, described increased stress, lack of recovery, and difficulty concentrating on academic studies. Such time poverty is reflective of findings by Kahu et al. (2014) that observe non-traditional students may opt to use efficiency-driven study strategies like time blocking or practical note taking to fill time gaps. However, such compensations hardly solve the tension entirely, and most of the subjects acknowledged that they worked under the state of catch-up. In the end, the balancing-act of apt time management in fields only added on to the interruption of academic work, as well as, the specific extension of the feeling of disruptiveness and inability to gain a proper foothold, on top of the general feeling of not being able to manage and not feeling equal in many ways, rather than directly pointing to the point of the challenges of the model of multiple roles and functions, as adopted by part-time postgraduate students.

Most of the participants admitted having gotten support in their work and education balance from their families. This assistance not only helped with some subjects but also provided an emotional boost, especially to male students who were much more relaxed and freer to do things and were even welcomed more because they were future providers. On the other hand, female students reported receiving more conditional support, usually limited to curfews, field preferences, and household responsibilities. As put by one of the participants, e.g. “Yes, they support me, but only until it is 5 p.m. and I still have to take care of the household.” This kind of ambivalent support can be ascribed to deeply rooted gender expectations. Although educationally oriented families promote study, women are given only symbolic or selective support due to conservative views of what women should do and become, how they should present their modest appearance and how others perceive them. The patterns are reflected in research as well. Perna (2000) suggested that support, emotionally and practically, given by the family is significant to those students who are juggling many identities.

Conclusion

This study examined how part-time postgraduate students in Rawalpindi balance academic duties, work commitments, and family responsibilities. Results showed



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that students, especially those managing both work and family, encountered substantial difficulties in sustaining their academic performance. Time management was identified as a key challenge, with many participants admitting that they often had to sacrifice at least one area of their life, typically family or studies. This frequently resulted in stress, emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of being overwhelmed.

The data showed that family support served a dual purpose. Emotional and practical support helped students persist academically, but gendered expectations, especially for female students, often limited that support. Women frequently received conditional support influenced by societal norms around domestic duties and public behaviour, reinforcing cultural expectations over their personal goals. Conversely, male students generally received more consistent encouragement and autonomy in managing their multiple roles.

The study also indicated that flexible work options somewhat reduced stress but did not eliminate the tension between competing roles. Many participants reported feelings of guilt, exhaustion, or inadequacy, highlighting the emotional toll of juggling responsibilities.

These findings strongly align with Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) Work-Family Conflict Theory, which explains that conflict arises when demands in one role hinder performance in another. Time-based conflict was most prominent, as students struggled to balance work, study, and family without compromising their performance or well-being. Strain-based conflict was also evident through emotional fatigue affecting performance across roles. Additionally, role theory offers insight into the gendered aspect of this conflict, emphasizing how cultural scripts influence individuals' perceived responsibilities and limitations across different roles.

In conclusion, part-time postgraduate students balancing work and family life navigate ongoing challenges related to time, identity, and support. The findings highlight the importance of institutional policies and family interventions that address role conflicts and ensure fair support, especially for female students. Universities, employers, and families need to acknowledge these difficulties and collaborate to create supportive environments where students can succeed academically without sacrificing their professional or personal well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, there are several recommendations and policy implications to solve the problem of managing multiple demands that part-time postgraduate students must meet:

- Universities also need to have evening classes, weekend classes and some hybrid classes (online and in-person) to promote working students.
- Introduce part-time academic advisors or counselling departments that have catered explicitly to part-time students, given the equally intense pressures of time and roles.
- Student-friendly spaces or collaborations with childcare providers would help relieve the pressure on the parent-students, particularly women.
- Study leaves or flexibility in the work hours may be incentives to encourage employers to offer study leaves to employees who undertake Postgraduate programs.



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- The agreement between universities and employers could serve this purpose. Encourage workplaces to understand the importance of education to develop their skills, and this should therefore support such educational pursuits.
- Community-based programs can subvert gendered notions of spheres of domestic and educational duties, particularly in respect of female education.
- Universities may conduct parent seminars where they explain to the relatives of registered students how to help them using emotional and logistical support to improve academic performance. Institutions with female students subject to limits on time and mobility may best be served by special scholarships, mentoring, or peer groups.
- There should be programs that are gender sensitive and aim to lessen academic barriers based on gender, particularly in conservative places. Focus on access and flexibility of education to non-traditional students.
- Encourage gender equality in access to education with the help of regulatory measures. This should promote inter-sector cooperation between government, academic institutions, and private employers to facilitate lifelong learning without any cost implications to the student due to family responsibilities or employment needs.
- The role of region-specific gender, family expectation and institutional responsiveness to dual-role students is an issue that should be studied further.
- Comparative analysis between urban and rural settings would also yield valuable insights.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

This study utilises primary data collected from the PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Ethical Statement

This research work was not previously published or submitted in any form.

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