



**EXPLORING STUDY HABITS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A  
COMPARISON OF PAKISTANI PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECONDARY  
STUDENTS**

**Dr. Iftikhar Haider Malik<sup>1</sup>, (Correspondent Author)**

Associate Professor, Department of English, Mukabbir University of Science & Technology,  
Gujrat –Pakistan.

[Iftikhar.Haider@mukabbiruniversity.edu.pk](mailto:Iftikhar.Haider@mukabbiruniversity.edu.pk)

**Dr. Usman Ahsan<sup>2</sup>,**

Associate Professor, Department of Commerce & Management Sciences, Mukabbir  
University of Science & Technology, Gujrat –Pakistan.

[usman.ahsan@mkabbiruniversity.edu.pk](mailto:usman.ahsan@mkabbiruniversity.edu.pk)

**Dr. Farhat Jabeen<sup>3</sup>,**

Director ORIC Mukabbir University of Science & Technology, Gujrat –Pakistan.

[drinstitute.research100@gmail.com](mailto:drinstitute.research100@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*The present study was conducted to examine the study habits and academic achievement of students enrolled in public and private secondary schools in Pakistan. The sample consisted of 100 secondary school students selected from District Gujrat, Punjab. Students' study habits were assessed using a standardized study habits and attitudes survey, while academic performance was measured through their previous year examination results. The findings of the study revealed that students from private schools demonstrated comparatively better study habits than those from public schools. However, no statistically significant difference was found between the two groups in terms of their academic performance. Furthermore, the results indicated a significant interaction between socioeconomic background and type of school in shaping students' study habits, whereas this interaction was not evident in their academic achievement. The study highlights the importance of developing effective study habits among students and suggests that both school environment and socioeconomic factors play a role in shaping learning behaviors. The findings have important implications for educators, policymakers, and parents in improving students' academic outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Academic performance, study habits, public schools, private schools, Pakistan.

**Introduction and Literature Review**

Pakistan is an emerging nation that has a diversified and dynamic educational system that serves a huge population in the government and privately. The education has grown dramatically in the last few decades, as there have been more people enrolling in schools, and many public and private schools have been opened in both urban and rural regions (Government of Pakistan, 2018). In spite of this growth, the issue of inequity in access, quality, and resources between state and privatized institutions is still a significant challenge in the Pakistani education system (Rahman, 2020).

Education in Pakistan generates more interest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is significant in national development and competitiveness in the world. Several reforms and policy measures have been launched to enhance the quality of education, teacher preparation, and curriculum (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2017). Nevertheless, socioeconomic inequality has persisted in affecting the academic opportunities and performance of students especially between those who attend the public and the private schools (Aslam, 2019).

As much as structural and institutional aspects are important, personal learner traits also contribute greatly to academic achievement. It has been a common finding that there are students of high intellectual ability who do not perform well as per expectations and vice versa. The interest of both educators and researchers has been drawn to this paradox (Hattie, 2012).



The phenomenon is usually linked to the difference in the learning environment, motivation, and access to academic support among Pakistani students (Ali, 2021).

Study habits have always been known to be a critical determinant of academic performance among the different factors that affect academic performance. The academic performance of the students is highly influenced by good study skills such as time management, revision, taking notes and setting of goals (Credé&Kuncel, 2008). On the other hand, bad study habits may impair performance and this is irrespective of the intellectual capabilities of a student. It is therefore advisable that the study practices of students in both the public and the private secondary schools in Pakistan be compared and contrasted with a view to ascertain any gap and provide solutions to improve the performance of the students.

Learning can be defined as the process of gaining knowledge, skills and competencies through teaching, learning and experience. The education environment in Pakistan recognizes learning in terms of responsiveness of the learners to environmental, social, emotional and cognitive stimuli and capacity to construct and apply new knowledge effectively (UNESCO, 2021). The factors contributing to effective learning are good teachers, conducive school conditions, relevant curricula, involvement of parents and quality of instructional materials. Of these, the study habits of students are the most important factors that define not only the result of the learning process but also its academic results (Hattie, 2012; Dunlosky et al., 2013).

Studies indicate that not all the students fail because they are not able but because of ineffective studying methods and bad learning habits (Gettinger& Seibert, 2002). Study habits are routines and preparations that students follow to acquire and retain knowledge such as time management, note taking, revising and focusing. In the Pakistani context, where the system of public versus private schools has some disparities, these habits may vary significantly due to disparities in resources, orientation towards various directions, and a culture of academics (Aslam, 2019). Students lack good study habits but they can be learned by working hard their lifetime, being disciplined and taught properly by teachers and parents (Zimmerman, 2002).

Academic performance is a complex construct that is affected by cognitive skills, antecedent knowledge, motivation, emotional stability and environmental influences (Deary et al., 2007). Empirical studies have shown many times that high-studying students achieve higher academic outcomes compared to low-studying students (Credé&Kuncel, 2008; Richardson et al., 2012). Likewise, low academic performance has a close relationship with bad study habits (Nonis& Hudson, 2010). Moreover, the role of parental engagement has been found to be an important contributor to the study behaviors and academic achievement of students, especially in third-world countries such as Pakistan (Hill and Tyson, 2009; Ali, 2021).

International studies also point out that systematic study behaviours have a great positive impact on the performance of students. To illustrate this, it has been established that students with well thought-out and planned learning approaches perform better in school (Dunlosky et al., 2013). In line with this, the study habits have been observed to be positively associated with the academic performance in different levels of education (Hattie, 2012).

In Pakistan, there have been no comparative studies on study habits between students of public and private secondary schools to date despite the fact that the number of research studies on academic performance has been on the rise in the past few years. The literature review indicates that socioeconomic status, school climate, the level of education of parents, and access to learning facilities are all significant predictors of study behaviors and academic performance among students (Aslam&Kingdon, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2018). Moreover, their study habits in the private schools are quite more developed due to the structured learning process and



availability of parental support, whereas students in the public schools may have certain problems with resources and support (Rahman, 2020).

Conclusively, the world and the Pakistani studies provide an overview that academic success does not entirely rely on intelligence but it is highly influenced by the study habits, mother and father engagement, and learning environment. These factors should be known in the Pakistani context - in particular the differences between the public and the private secondary school students in order to improve the educational performance and reduce the gap in performances.

### **Study Rationale**

Inequality in academic performance among students in Pakistan, especially among those in both public and private secondary schools have been a long-standing problem. The discrepancy in the performance of these two sectors has resulted in a gap that has remained the concern of educators, policymakers and parents. Numerous stakeholders are becoming more interested in the reason behind this gap in educational performance of students in order to enhance their educational performance.

Parents in Pakistan also go a long way to offer quality education and greater opportunities to their children. Nevertheless, differences in school facilities, the quality of teaching, learning conditions and study habits among students usually affect academic performance. Study habits are some of these factors, which are important determinants in the way students interact with their studies and how they handle their learning process.

Furthermore, even though there has been an increased interest in educational enhancement in Pakistan, there remains very scarce comparative studies that specifically investigate the importance study habits in influencing academic success amongst public and secondary school students in Pakistan. Institutional differences are mostly the focus of most discussions with less focus being directed to the individual learning practices of students.

Thus, the aim of this study is to compare and contrast the study patterns and academic performance of the students in the Pakistani public and private secondary schools. By highlighting major differences, the study aims at offering information that can assist in coming up with effective measures that can be adopted to improve the performance of the students as well as reduce the gap that currently exists between the two sectors.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Students in the secondary public schools in Pakistan perform considerably poorer in their study habits and academic performance compared to those in their secondary schools of the private schools.
2. The socioeconomic status and the type of school are important in their interactive relationship, which affects the study habits and academic performance among students.

### **Methodology**

#### **Description of Research Instrument**

It was a type of study that was Quantitative. The questionnaire applied in this research was based on the established and popular scales concerning the study habits and academic behavior. These sources include the work of Credé and Kuncel (2008), Pauk (2005), Zimmerman (2002), and Hasan Shah (2013). Ten items (10) questionnaire representing three different dimensions, including Section A for Study Habits, Section B for Learning Behavior and Environment, and Section C for Academic Achievement was used to collect data..

These studies have useful measures of the way students handle their study time, learning strategies, self-regulation and academic behaviors. Based on modification of the items of these

standard tools the questionnaire was constructed to successfully measure the study habits and academic performance of the secondary school students in Pakistani setting.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the current study consisted of 100 Grade 10 science students in the secondary schools of District Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan. The sample was balanced both between the students of the state schools and the students of the privatized schools and comprised 50 students of each type. There was an even distribution of both the males and females and all the participants were in the same science curriculum to make them comparable.

Students of four schools were selected with the help of purposive sampling method. The age of the participants ranged from 14 to 16 years ( $M = 14.57$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). The school admission data showed that the majority of students were middle and upper-middle socioeconomic status with a fairly educated parental background.

### Results and Discussion

#### Section A: Study Habits

Question 1. I follow a regular study schedule at home.

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	7	5	5	7	6
Female		4	5	4	2	5
Male	Private	4	5	4	2	5
Female		8	5	8	5	4

**Table 1** shows distinct gender and school sector differences in study schedule habits. The responses of male students in the public schools are very scattered with equal numbers indicating strong agreement (7) and disagreement (7) to the practice of having regular study schedule. The relatively high level of strongly disagree (6) answers also indicates that a good proportion of male public students have difficulties disciplining study routine. Moderate responses are more common to female students in the public schools, with the majority of students in the agree (5) and neutral (4) category. Nevertheless, the existence of strongly disagree (5) represents that a group still does not have the regular study practices.

Male students in the private school have a slightly more positive tendency with agree (5) as the highest category and less negative responses (disagree = 2), which implies relatively good study scheduling as compared with those in the public school. The best trend is observed among the female learners in private schools where strong agree (8) is the best in all the groups. This implies that female students of private schools are more prone to a regular studying routine. Even though there is some variability (neutral = 8), the responses tend to be generally positive in regard to study behavior. Overall, the findings indicate that students of Private schools (and girls in particular) are more disciplined in their studies. Boys in public schools are least consistent in studying schedules. Gender differences imply that the female students tend to have better study habits compared to male students in the two sectors.

Question 2. I complete my homework and assignments on time.

**Table 2; Homework & Assignments**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	7	4	4	6	9
Female		3	2	6	6	3
Male	Private	5	6	3	3	4
Female		4	9	5	7	4

**Results in Table 2** report on secondary school students having mixed study behavior in terms of homework and assignment completion on time. The answers of male students of the public sector are more or less spread out, with a bit more Strongly Disagree (9) and Disagree (6) than Strongly Agree (7), implying a lower consistency in submitting assignments on time. Among female students of the public sector, more answers are based on Neutral (6) and Disagree (6) and the answers with the strong positive response are fewer. This demonstrates moderate/low dedication to doing homework on time.

By contrast, male students of the private sector exhibit a more balanced (and slightly positive tendency) with more Agree (6) and Strongly Agree (5) than negative answers, which also reflects a better study discipline. On the same note, female students in the private sector show the best trend, with the most frequency being in Agree (9) but some variability is also present with some significant Disagree (7) responses. In general, the home work performance is better among students in the private sector (Both male and female) than among the students in the public sector. Nevertheless, the fact that there were also neutral and negative responses in all groups is indicative that the punctuality of assignment completion is not always high and may need academic support interventions.

Question 3. I revise my class lessons daily.

**Table 3; Lesson Revision**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	10	5	10	0	5
Female		5	4	5	5	1
Male	Private	5	3	2	4	6
Female		5	6	8	4	7

**The data in Table 3** illustrates that gender and school sector differences in the everyday revision practices are visible. The male students in the case of students in a public school show quite a better revision habit with a higher percentage of strongly agree and agree (15 responses combined) and a very low percentage disagreeing. At the public school, women are more ambivalent with some level of agreement, neutral and some level of disagreement with the answers, which means that there is relative inconsistency in the everyday revision. On the contrary, revision patterns of students at the private schools are generally weaker. Male

students have more disagreements (10 responses united to disagree and strongly disagree) compared to agreement (8 responses) that indicates an irregular revision practice. On the same note, the most undesirable inclination is depicted by female students of the private schools that had the least combination of disagreement (11 responses) and the relatively low rate of strong agreement. In total, the findings show that the students of a state school, and male students in particular, are more consistent in their daily revision of the lessons, and students of a privatized school, and female students in particular, showed less regular revision habits, but more variability, and disagreement.

Question 4. I can study effectively without being distracted (e.g., mobile phone, TV).

**Table 4; Study Distraction**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	7	1	7	9	6
Female		0	4	3	5	8
Male	Private	4	7	3	1	5
Female		3	7	8	7	5

**The data results in Table 4** finds that there is significant gender and school sector effects on the capacity of students to study without distraction. The answers of male pupils in the state schools are rather scattered, with a comparatively large percentage of those who disagree (9) and who strongly disagree (6) than those who strongly agree (7). This implies that distraction is a big problem to a considerable number of male students in the public sector. By contrast, the trends among female students in public schools are more negative, with no students strongly agreeing (0) and most tending to disagree (5) and strongly disagree (8). This implies that the public-sector females exhibit relatively low self-reported abilities to study without distractions. In the case of the private school sector, the positive pattern is more pronounced with male students showing greater numbers in agree (7) and strongly agree (4) and less in disagreement. This implies improved distraction control in male students of the private school. Female students in the private schools, however, show mixed reactions with significant frequencies in neutral (8), agree (7), and disagree (7) groups. This implies inconsistency and unpredictability when it comes to their capability to avoid distractions. In sum, students in private schools especially males seem to have more control over distractions as compared to those in public schools especially females who complain of being more challenged in maintaining concentration when studying.

Question 5. I take notes during class to help me understand the subject better.

**Table 5; Taking Notes in Class**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	5	10	5	7	3
Female		2	3	7	4	4

Male	Private	5	4	5	3	3
Female		3	9	9	4	5

**The data results in Table 5** demonstrates that there is a great variation in gender and school sector with reference to note taking. The percentage of male respondents in students of the public schools is comparatively equal with an average inclination to positive answers (15 students agree/strongly agreeing). However, a considerable portion also showed disagreement, which shows that there is inconsistency in taking notes. On the other hand, the female students in the public school demonstrate less participation, the percentage of the answers in the negative and neutral range is greater, i.e., these students are less likely to take notes regularly. The male students in the private school sector are once again more in the moderate positive engagement but the responses are distributed more equally on all categories. Conversely, students in a private school (female students) have a higher percentage of agreement (12 students) but a high neutral response, showing that though many students take notes, a significant portion of students are either unsure or inconsistent. Additionally, Male students (both sectors) show moderate, but inconsistent note taking habits. The girls of the state schools do not appear to be so active in note taking. In private school, female students have a comparatively high level of note taking behavior at a very doubtful level.

**Section B: Learning Behavior and Environment**

Question 6. I prefer studying in a quiet and organized environment.

**Table 6; Study Environment**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	5	6	9	6	4
Female		4	5	4	5	2
Male	Private	2	3	3	9	3
Female		6	4	6	7	7

**Results from Table 6** is not strongly agreeing that there is a consensus on preferences on learning in a quiet and organised environment, where there is quite noticeable difference in preference between genders and sector. The reactions of the male students in the public sector are rather neutral (maximum frequency) and then it is followed by an agreement meaning that they do not give an opinion about the preference in strong terms they are just moderate inclined to it. The female students of the public sector have a small inclination towards the agreeing meaning that they are slightly more inclined towards quiet and organized learning environments than their male counterparts in the sector.

The male group in the private sector has a specific tendency towards disagreement, i.e., most of the students in the group are not dependent and/or affected by quiet and organized environment to study. The trend is more polarized among the female students of the private sector with a relatively high response in both the agreement and the disagreement category showing split perceptions amongst this group of students. Overall, it can be stated that the public sector students are more inclined to neutral-to-agree answers whereas the students of the private sector and, in particular, females are more variable and exhibit more patterns of disagreement.

Question 7. I seek help from teachers or classmates when I do not understand a topic.

**Table 7: Seek Help to Understand Topic**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	6	3	10	6	5
Female		4	4	2	5	5
Male	Private	8	3	2	3	4
Female		5	4	8	7	6

**Table 7 shows** a medium reliance on teachers and classmates to give educational assistance, and there is cross-gender, cross-sector variance evident. In the public sector, male students are more likely to have a neutral response (the greatest response) which shows that they are less consistent in their help seeking behavior, although a considerable number of them also agree or strongly agree. The responses of female students in the public are more polarized with the responses being spread out among agreement, neutrality and disagreement indicating inconsistent help-seeking behavior. Male students tend to seek help more in the private sector and their Strongly Agree responses are higher and disagree responses are lower meaning that their academic support-seeking behavior is more active. The trend of the private female students, on the other hand, is ambivalent and slightly negative with a comparatively higher disagreement and neutrality indicating less uniformity in dependence on peer/teacher support as compared to males in the same sector.

Question 8. I use additional learning resources (e.g., internet, guides, books) beyond textbooks.

**Table 8; Use Additional Resources**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	10	5	3	4	8
Female		3	4	4	3	6
Male	Private	3	3	5	2	7
Female		12	2	3	8	5

**The data results from Table 8** Provides quite a polarized and ambivalent image regarding the usage of other learning resources in comparison with textbooks by the students, with clear differences by gender and by school sectors. The response to the question is fairly spread across the populace (Male students), with a specific bias to disagreement and strong disagreement suggesting that a good number of male students in the public-school environment are less likely to regularly use supplementary learning materials. In the case of the female students of the public sector, the level of engagement is also low to moderate with higher numbers of the students in the disagree category which depict the lack of reliance on other learning materials though some of them are neutral.

The trend of the neutral to disagree with the neutral in the private sector (Male students) is biased towards the neutral with less number of students reporting that they agreed. This is an indication that even in the private schools, male students are not always using additional learning materials. Nonetheless, female students in the private sector are more polarized and divided in their reactions: on the one hand, the number of students who strongly agree is quite high and signifies the active use of the supplementary resources, but on the other hand, there are also students who disagree, which shows the inequality in access or different study habits among the sample.

**Section C: Academic Achievement (Self-Perception)**

Question 9. I am satisfied with my academic performance in school.

**Table 9; Satisfaction from Performance**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	8	4	7	7	4
Female		7	7	2	0	4
Male	Private	1	3	3	5	8
Female		5	7	4	7	7

**The data in Table 9** The differences in perceived academic satisfaction between boys and girls and between boys and girls in school sector are significant. The level of academic satisfaction among female students in the public sector is higher and a high positive response (Agree + Strongly Agree = 14 out of 20) and in the male counterparts the numbers of agreement, neutrality and disagreement are nearly similar hence a high level of satisfaction but with a high level of uncertainty.

In the private sector, among the male students, it can be seen that the maximum academic satisfaction score is in the negative range (Disagree + Strongly Disagree = 13 out of 20) showing that they are not satisfied with their academic performance. Female students of the private schools demonstrate a more equal yet rather negative pattern, as the answers were spread over all categories, and the level of disagreement is rather high. Overall, students of public schools particularly females are more likely to be satisfied with their academic performance, but male students of private schools are the least satisfied. It suggests that sector seems to have a greater impact on academic self-perception in comparison with gender alone.

Question 10. My study habits positively affect my exam results.

**Table 10; Study Habits VS Exam Results**

Gender	Sector	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Male	Public	9	3	6	5	7
Female		4	6	2	4	4
Male	Private	10	3	2	1	4



Female		7	6	6	5	6
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**Results from Table 10** report a general positive belief that their studying behaviours have an impact on exam performance but to varying levels based on gender and sector. Students (Public sector) of the male gender are divided into two parts, and the responses of both positive (12) and negative (12) are equal, which implies their attitudes to the effectiveness of studying were either vague or inconsistent. The female students (Public sector) are positive marginally with the greatest agreement (10) and the least disagreement (8) that the students moderately believe in the effects of study habits.

Male students (Private sector) have the best positive perception, with distinctly more agreement (13) than disagreement (5) on the study habits enhancing results. The positive attitude of female students (Private sector) also seem to be quite positive (13 agree vs. 11 disagree) though the disagreement level is quite high and may be explained by the ambivalent academic confidence or the efficiency of the studying process. Finally, study habits among students in private schools, especially boys are more correlated with exam performance compared to mixed or uncertain among students in the public schools, especially boys.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The present research could be considered a pilot study, since it was conducted on a very narrow sample of students that were sampled in the secondary schools in the District of Gujrat, Punjab. The limited number of samples and the locality of the study renders the possibility of generalizing the findings to the entire population of secondary school students in Pakistan impossible. The state of education, resources and backgrounds of students in many areas of the country, particularly between the urban and rural areas, can differ significantly and therefore they may impact differently on the study habits and performance in school. The other shortcoming is that the research emphasized more on quantitative data. Even though this approach helped to identify the trends and differences between the public and the private schools, it did not provide an in-depth description of the causes of the differences. The students of varying socioeconomic status and conditions in schools may have varying challenges and motivations that require further discovery.

It is recommended that in future research the sample size should be bigger and more diverse and representative of various provinces and regions of Pakistan. This would allow improved generalizations. In addition, a qualitative approach (interviews and observations) would be incorporated to learn more about study habits of students, their learning circumstances and learning challenges. To gain a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms influencing study habit and achievement in school, a mixed-method design can be used.

### **Implications**

Despite these limitations, the present research is significant as it provides a comparative understanding of differences in the study behaviors and academic performance of the students in the public and the private secondary schools in Pakistan. The results indicate how effective study practices are important in determining the academic success of students. In addition, the study holds great implications to teachers, policy makers, school administrators and parents. It highlights the importance of teacher embracing better teaching techniques that promote better studying practices among the learners. The policy implications of the findings to the policymakers/educational planners are that it is worth planning interventions and reforms that can promote successful learning habits in the population (public) and in the private sector. Additionally, the study gives a strong emphasis on the role of parents in ensuring that their children excel in their studies through instilling in them, controlled and



disciplined studying behaviors at home. Overall, these lessons may contribute to the improvement of the performance of students, promoting them to study in a more efficient and systematic manner.

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