

# Factors affecting academic performance of students at the University of Burao (UOB), Somaliland

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## ABSTRACT

The academic performance of students has been a subject of interest for educational researchers for a while; however, most of the research in this area was done outside of Somaliland. Therefore, this study examined factors affecting the academic performance of students in Burao, Somaliland. The study aimed to investigate the influence of employment status, learning style preference, test anxiety, and English communication problems on the students' GPAs. The undergraduate students of the University of Burao participated in this study. Using stratified sampling, 333 students were chosen from six different faculties, and data was gathered by a questionnaire. The response rate was 69%, so data from 230 students were analyzed using a Binomial logistic regression with the help of SPSS 21. The result indicated that employment status has no significant effect on students' GPAs, while the other three variables had effects on it. Regarding the influence of learning style preference, the students with auditory learning styles had 3.0 times higher odds of achieving higher grades than students with visual learning styles. The study also discovered that for every one-unit increase in test anxiety, students were 0.56 times less likely to achieve higher grades. Moreover, for every one-unit increase in English communication problems, students were 0.63 times less likely to achieve higher grades. In short, of the four predictor variables, only learning style preference, test anxiety, and English communication problems affected students' GPAs in different ways. Therefore, the study made several recommendations including the use of various lecture delivery techniques by lecturers and the development of an English communication policy by the university.

**Keywords:** GPA, employment status, learning style preference, test anxiety, English communication skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

Students' academic performance has been a subject of interest for educational researchers for a while; however, most of the research in this area was done outside Somaliland. Academic performance has been defined in different ways by different researchers; for example, Ward et al. in 1996 (as cited in Bhagat, 2013) defined academic performance as "The outcome of education — the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals". Academic performance is generally evaluated through examinations or constant appraisals, but there are no common methods of assessment and performance aspects that are agreed to concentrate on (Ward et al., cited in Bhagat, 2013). Many researchers have examined the possible influence that different factors

can have on students' performance. For instance, Mlambo (2012) assessed the influence of entry qualifications, learning style, age, and gender on students' academic performance.

### Students' employment status

Various researchers studied the influences of employment status on students' GPAs; however, their findings are contradicting. For example, several researchers identified that there is no significant relationship between students' GPAs and their employment status (Ouattara, 2017; Nurhafizah et al., 2021; Daniels, 2016; Tessema et al.,

2014; Rijavec et al., 2017). In contrast, some other researchers identified that employed students achieve higher grades (Muluk, 2017; Nuvianto Al Azis and Yusanti, 2021). On the other hand, García-Vargas et al. (2016) discovered that having a paid job negatively affects students' grades. In conclusion, most of the researchers argued that there is no significant relationship between the two variables.

### Students' learning style

Learning style preference (visual, aural, read-write, and kinesthetics) of the students can also influence students' GPAs, but the relevant literature found opposing results. Some researchers claimed that learning style preference significantly affects students' GPAs (Germain, Galy and Lee, 2014; Nuzhat, Salem, Hamdan and Ashour, 2013; Magulod, 2019; Akhlaghi et al., 2018). However, these studies did not agree on how learning style influences the GPAs of students; for instance, Akhlaghi et al. (2018) discovered that students with a read-write learning style had higher grades than students with other learning style preferences. On the contrary, others argued that Kinesthetic and visual learners achieve higher grades than other students (Germain et al., 2014; Magulod, 2019). On the other hand, Nuzhat et al. (2013) mentioned that students who have multiple learning style preferences get higher grades than those with single learning style preferences.

Differently, Al-Zayed (2017), Paiboonsithiwong et al. (2016), Bhalli et al. (2015), Chaudhary et al. (2015), Urval et al. (2014), Kohan et al. (2021), Almigbal (2015) and Mozaffari et al. (2020) pointed out that the learning style preference has no a significant effect on students' GPAs. Therefore, most of the relevant studies outlined that the two variables don't have a significant relationship.

### Test anxiety

Test anxiety is also one of the factors that affect students' GPAs as identified in several studies. Test anxiety has a significant negative effect on the students' GPAs (Ahmad et al., 2018; Onyekuru and Ibegbunam, 2014; Iroegbu, 2013; Dawood et al., 2016; Okoye and Oghenekaro, 2020; Zhang and Henderson, 2014; Sideeg, 2015). This shows that there is a strong consensus among researchers that test anxiety negatively affects students' GPAs.

### English communication skills

GPAs may be influenced by a student's proficiency in the language that is used for instruction. In the University of Burao context, there is no clear medium of instruction that

every lecturer should use. Some lecturers speak English in class, while others never use it as the language of instruction. However, all the books and other materials are written in English, so this could affect Somali students during their independent reading.

Several studies investigated the impact of English communication skills on GPAs, and some of them stated that proficiency in English affects academic performance positively (AlMously, Salem and AlHamdan, 2013; Aina, Ogundele and Olanipekun, 2013; Xu and Mossop, 2014; Ghenghesh, 2015; Kaliyadan et al., 2015; Al-Qahtani, 2013). Contrary to these studies, Aina and Sunday (2013), Addow et al. (2013) and Casama Orlanda-Ventayen (2019) mentioned that there is no significant relationship between English communication skills and the students' GPAs. Therefore, there are contradictory findings in the research on the relationship between English communication skills and students' GPAs.

### Research objective

Like investments in the business sector, one can also invest in himself or herself to generate higher income in the future and thereby attain good living standards. This form of investment is known as "Human Capital Investment" which Becker (1962) defined as any action that affects future income by embedding capital in people. Human capital can be improved through education, training, health care, vitamin intake, and getting information about how the economy works (Becker, 1962). Therefore, education is a way of achieving a good future and prosperous life. Nevertheless, in order for education to result in that desirable outcome, student performance needs to be at a high level. In this regard, the GPA which is the most commonly used measure of academic performance must be attractive and help students in getting enjoyable jobs. Although the academic performance of the students has this higher degree of importance and deserves to be kept at a good level, the GPAs of the UoB students are not good. For instance, Elmi (2022) stated that 37% of UoB's students got less than a GPA of 3.0. Similarly, Elmi et al. (2022) identified that 22.2% of UoB students had less than a GPA of 3.0. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify factors that affect student academic performance at the University of Burao by giving attention to specific factors such as employment status; learning style preference; test anxiety, and English communication skills.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research design

This survey research aimed to identify factors that

influence the academic performance (GPA) of the students by collecting cross-sectional data from the students of the University of Burao. The study examined the relationship between the GPAs of the students and four independent variables (employment status, learning style preference, test anxiety, and English communication problems).

### Population and sampling

University of Burao (UoB) is a community-owned university that is located in Burao, the second largest city in Somaliland. Furthermore, about 2000 students were studying at eight different faculties of the university which were the Faculty of Business and Economics; Faculty of ICT; Faculty of Engineering; Faculty of Veterinary and Agriculture; Faculty of Medicine; Faculty of Education; and the Faculty of Sharia and Law. The study used a proportionate stratified random sampling method in which 333 questionnaires were distributed among students of six faculties (Engineering, Veterinary, Agriculture, ICT, medicine, and Business and Economics).

### Data collection method

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire containing five sections. The first four sections presented the independent variables of the study whereas the last section (GPA) was the dependent variable of the study. In the demographic section, there was one independent variable (employment status). The second section contained ten items measuring the test anxiety levels of the students. To reflect their test anxiety level, students read statements developed by Salehi and Marefat (2014), then they stated the extent to which the statements were describing them using a 5-point Likert scale which had five levels (Not at all typical of me, not very typical of me, somewhat typical of me, fairly typical of me, and very much typical of me). The third section also represented one independent variable (learning style preference) in which students chose from VARK learning styles (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic) to tell their learning preference. This study used the VARK learning style model developed by Fleming in 1987. The fourth independent variable in section four, English communication problems, was represented by six items, and students were deciding whether they agreed with these statements or not using the 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To measure the students' English communication problems, this study adopted a scale made by Lebcir et al. (2008). The last section contained only one question which asked students to rate their overall GPA of the last semester; besides, they were given only two options (less than 3.0

and 3.0 or above).

### Reliability and validity

In order to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, six items measuring English communication problems and nine items measuring students' test anxiety were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha test indicated that the questionnaire had an acceptable level of internal consistency (Test anxiety: 0.823 and English Communication problems: 0.693). In order for a given scale to be reliable, the result of Cronbach's alpha must be a minimum of 0.7 (Bolarinwa, 2015). The face validity of the questionnaire items was assessed by a panel of three experts. To evaluate whether the items in the questionnaire would be suitable for measuring the student's English communication problems and test anxiety, the panel employed a four-point Likert scale whose levels were "not relevant, somewhat relevant, quite relevant, and very relevant". The experts' assessment determined that the face validity index of the English communication problem and test anxiety items were 0.80 and 0.70 respectively. The minimum FVI value that can be accepted is 0.7 (Oso, 2013). Therefore, the questionnaire items were valid.

### Data analysis

To analyze the data, the study used descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distributions, measures of central tendency, and measures of dispersion. Moreover, the study employed a Binomial Logistic Regression tool to assess the relationship between the research variables with the help of SPSS 21.

## RESULTS

### Demographic data

In this section, the demographic data of the students was analyzed and interpreted. Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents (78.7%) were male, while 21.3% were female. Moreover, the table shows that the age of 80.4% of the respondents was 23 or younger, while 19.6% of them were older than 23 years. The study also investigated the employment status of the respondents, and the result showed that 53% of the students were unemployed, 16.1% had a full-time job, and 30.9% had a part-time job. Regarding faculties, the largest group of students (35%) were in the Business and Economics faculty, followed by the ICT faculty (17.8%), the Medical faculty (16.1%), the Veterinary faculty (13%), the Engineering faculty (11.3%), and the Agriculture department (6.5%).

**Table 1.** Demographic information.

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Gender			
Male	181	78.7	78.7
Female	49	21.3	100
Total	230	100	
Age			
23 or younger	185	80.4	80.4
Older than 23	45	19.6	100
Total	230	100	
Employment status			
Unemployed	122	53	53
Full-time job	37	16.1	69.1
Part-time job	71	30.9	100
Total	230	100	
Faculty			
ICT	41	17.8	17.8
Engineering	26	11.3	29.1
Veterinary	30	13	42.1
Agriculture	15	6.5	48.7
Medicine	37	16.1	64.8
Bus & Eco	81	35.2	100
Total	230	100	

## Descriptive statistics

This section presents descriptive statistics of the study's main variables such as test anxiety, learning style preference, and English communication problems.

### *Learning style of the students*

Table 2 shows the learning style preferences of the students. The result shows that 17% of the students were visual learners, 22.6% were aural learners, 23.9% were read/write learners, 14.3% were Kinesthetic learners, and 22.2% had more than one learning style. This means nearly 69% of them were visual learners, aural learners, and kinesthetic learners.

### *Test anxiety*

Table 3 shows the test anxiety levels of the students based on nine different statements that were used as indicators of the concept of test anxiety. With a Mean score of 1.817 and a Standard Deviation of 1.0316, the respondents stated that the statement "thoughts of doing poorly

interfere with my performance on examinations" did not reflect behavior that was very typical of them. Similarly, with a Mean of 1.9304 and a Standard Deviation of 1.1425, the respondents pointed out that the statement "During an examination, I frequently get so nervous that I forget facts I know" did not represent behavior that was very typical of them. As can be seen from the Mean of 1.5087 and Standard Deviation of 1.0054, the participants indicated that the behavior shown by the statement "While taking an important exam, I perspire a great deal" was not at all typical of them. With a Mean of 1.6217 and a Standard Deviation of 1.1822, the participants mentioned that the behavior reflected by the statement "During examinations, I find myself thinking of things unrelated to the actual study material" was not at all typical of them. The respondents also assessed whether the statement that "I feel very panicky when I have to take an exam" was revealing a behavior, and with a Mean of 1.9435 and Standard Deviation of 1.2261, they stated that this was not very typical of them. With a Mean of 1.5957 and a Standard Deviation of 1.0436, the respondents indicated that the behavior presented by the statement "After important tests, I am frequently so tense that my stomach gets upset" was not at all typical. Likewise, students assessed whether the statement that "I usually feel my heart beating very fast

during an exam” was showing a behavior them, and with a Mean of 1.7957 and Standard Deviation of 1.1203, they said that this was not at all typical of them. In addition, with a Mean of 1.4739 and Standard Deviation, the participants revealed that the behavior reflected by the statement “I usually get very depressed after taking an exam” was not at all typical of them. Moreover, with a Mean of 1.8130 and a Standard Deviation of 1.1615, the participants pointed

out that the behavior presented by the statement “I wish examinations did not bother me so much” was not very typical of them.

Finally, the overall mean which measures the average of all scores of the nine items is 1.6463 with a Standard Deviation of 1.1007, and it shows that on average students did not have a significant level of test anxiety.

**Table 2.** Learning styles preferences.

Learning styles	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Visual learners	39	17	17
Aural learners	52	22.6	39.6
Read/Write learners	55	23.9	63.5
Kinesthetic learners	33	14.3	77.8
More than one style	51	22.2	100
Total	230	100	

**Table 3.** Test anxiety.

No	Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Thoughts of doing poorly interfere with my performance on examinations.	1.817	1.0316	Not very typical of me
2	During an examination, I frequently get so nervous that I forget facts I know	1.9304	1.1425	Not very typical of me
3	While taking an important exam, I perspire a great deal	1.5087	1.0054	Not at all typical of me
4	During examinations, I find myself thinking of things unrelated to the actual study material	1.6217	1.1822	Not at all typical of me
5.	feel very panicky when I have to take an exam	1.9435	1.2261	Not very typical of me
6.	After important tests, I am frequently so tense that my stomach gets upset	1.5957	1.0436	Not at all typical of me
7.	I usually feel my heart beating very fast during an exam	1.7957	1.1203	Not at all typical of me
8.	I usually get very depressed after taking an exam	1.4739	0.9930	Not at all typical of me
9.	I wish examinations did not bother me so much	<b>1.8130</b>	<b>1.1615</b>	Not very typical of me
10	Overall mean	1.6463	1.1007	Not very typical of me

### **English language communication problems**

Table 4 shows the English communication problems of the participants. With a Mean of 2.0435 and a Standard Deviation of 1.1738, the respondents disagreed with the statement that “they find reading lessons difficult when they are in an independent reading”. According to the Mean of 2.2174 and Standard Deviation of 1.3464, respondents disagreed with the statement that “The students find writing reports and essays difficult”. Moreover, participants were neutral to the statement that “they cannot understand the meaning of some words when they are reading lessons” as indicated by the mean of 3.3043 and standard deviation of 1.2893. On the other hand, respondents were neutral to the statement that “Students find it difficult to express their thoughts in spoken English” as shown by the Mean of 2.8565 and Standard

Deviation of 1.3959. With a Mean of 2.1696 and a Standard Deviation of 1.5671, they disagreed with the statement that “they would like Books and other study material to be written in Somali”. According to the Mean of 2.6652 and Standard Deviation of 3.7714, the participants were neutral to the statement that “they would like teachers to explain lessons in the Somali language”. Lastly, with a Mean of 2.5427 and a Standard Deviation of 1.7573, the respondents disagreed that they have any problems with English language skills.

### **GPA of the students**

Table 5 shows that the GPA of 29.6 % of the students was less than 3.0, while 70.4% of the students had 3.0 or above.

**Table 4.** English language and communication problems.

No	Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	I find reading lessons difficult when I am in an independent reading	2.0435	1.1738	Disagree
2	I find writing reports and essays difficult	2.2174	1.3464	Disagree
3	I cannot understand the meaning of some words when I am reading lessons	3.3043	1.2893	Neutral
4	I find it difficult to express my thoughts in spoken English	2.8565	1.3959	Neutral
5	I would like Books and other study materials to be written in Somali	2.1696	1.5671	Disagree
6	I would like teachers to explain lessons in the Somali language	2.6652	3.7714	Neutral
7	Overall	2.5427	1.7573	Disagree

**Table 5.** Last semester's GPA of the students.

Students' GPA	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Less than 3.0	68	29.6	29.6
3.0 or greater	162	70.4	100
Total	230	100	

### Relationship between research variables

Binomial logistic regression was carried out to identify the effects of employment status, learning style preference, English communication problems, and test anxiety on the likelihood that students had a higher GPA. The relationship between the continuous independent variables and the logit of the dependent variable was tested using the Box-Tidwell procedure. Based on the test, all continuous independent variables were found to have a linear relationship with the dependent variable's logit. Moreover, the Pearson correlation test was conducted, and it showed that the independent variables of the study were not highly correlated. The logistic regression model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(7) = 33.6$ ,  $p < .0005$ . The model explained 19.3% (Nagelkerke  $R^2$ ) of the variance in the GPA of the students and correctly classified 73.9% of cases.

Sensitivity was 93.8%, specificity was 26.5%, positive predictive value was 75.2%, and negative predictive value was 64.3%. Of the four predictor variables, three were statistically significant: test anxiety, English communication problems, and learning style preference as shown in Table 6. Students with auditory learning styles had 3.0 times higher odds of achieving higher grades than students with visual learning styles. The table indicates that for every one-unit increase in test anxiety, students were 0.56 times less likely to achieve higher grades. Moreover, for every one-unit increase in English communication problems, students were 0.63 times less likely to achieve higher grades. This means there is a negative relationship between English communication problems and students' GPAs. In other words, English communication skills positively affect students' GPAs.

**Table 6.** Relationship between the research variables.

Predictor variables	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.L. for Exp(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Test anxiety	-0.581	0.243	5.729	1	0.017	0.559	0.347	0.900
English communication problems	-0.465	0.187	6.210	1	0.013	0.628	0.436	0.905
Unemployment status	-0.359	0.323	1.238	1	0.266	0.698	0.371	1.315
Learning Style preference			11.421	1	0.022			
Visual learners	-0.639	0.480	1.770	1	0.183	0.528	0.206	1.353
Aural learners	1.101	0.544	4.101	1	0.043	3.008	1.036	8.732
Read and write learners	-0.354	0.451	0.614	1	0.433	0.702	0.290	1.701
Kinesthetic learners	-0.202	0.529	0.146	1	0.702	1.224	0.434	3.451
Constant	3.290	0.628	27.403	1	0.000	26.832		

## DISCUSSION

This study indicated that there is no significant association between employment status and students' GPAs. Thus, this study is in harmony with some other studies' findings (Ouattara, 2017; Nurhafizah et al., 2021; Daniels, 2016; Tessema et al., 2014; Rijavec et al., 2017).

Regarding the influence of students' learning style preference, this study indicated that students with auditory learning styles had 3.0 times higher odds of achieving higher grades than students with visual learning styles. This study is inconsistent with (Germain, Galy and Lee, 2014; Nuzhat, Salem, Hamdan and Ashour, 2013; Magulod, 2019; Akhlaghi et al., 2018) who discovered that students' learning style preferences determine their GPAs. However, the current research disagrees with these studies regarding how learning style preference affects students' GPAs. For instance, Nuzhat et al. (2013) mentioned that students who have multiple learning style preferences get higher grades than those with single learning style preferences.

When it comes to the relationship between test anxiety and students' GPA, this study identified that there is a significant negative relationship. Therefore, this study is in line with the findings of Ahmad et al. (2018), Onyekuru and Ibegunam (2014), Iroegbu (2013), Dawood et al. (2016), Okoye and Oghenekaro (2020), Zhang and Henderson (2014) and Sideeg (2015).

Moreover, the current study indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between students' English communication skills and students' GPAs. Several other researchers also found similar results (AlMously, Salem and AlHamdan, 2013; Aina, Ogundele and Olanipekun, 2013; Light, Xu and Mossop, 1987; Ghenghesh, 2015; Kaliyadan et al., 2015; Al-Qahtani, 2013).

## Conclusion

This research tried to study the potential influence of employment status, learning style preference, test anxiety, and English communication skills on students' GPAs. Three factors (test anxiety, learning style preferences, and English communication skills) significantly affected students' GPAs. The study found that test anxiety has a negative effect on students' GPAs. Furthermore, the study identified that students with visual learning styles have lower GPAs compared to students with auditory learning style preferences. Moreover, it was revealed that there is a positive relationship between English communication skills and students' GPAs or a negative relationship between English communication problems and the GPAs of students. Therefore, the students' performance can be improved by concentrating on the three independent factors that affect their GPAs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study made the following recommendations:

1. Lecturers should use different lecture delivery methods so that students with different learning style preferences can understand lessons. For example, University of Burao lecturers must use a mixture of lectures, practical sessions, videos, and pictures. Specifically, lecturers must use more visual aids in their lectures because the study indicated that the students with visual learning preferences had lower GPAs than students with auditory learning style preferences.
2. The University should come up with a policy for improving students' English communication skills by setting an effective curriculum for English courses that are taken in the degree programs. This will improve students' knowledge of the English language.
3. In order for the students to internalize and exercise their English language knowledge, the University's medium of instruction should be English. This makes it easier for students and lecturers to communicate in English, which helps them to improve their communication skills.
4. The Test anxiety of the students should be minimized as much as possible through counseling and guidance, and students should be advised not to be afraid of exams. In this aspect, there is a need to conduct more research on factors influencing students' test anxiety in order for educationalists to be able to control students' test anxiety.

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