

## An Examination of Factors Linked to Poor Academic Performance of Primary School Students

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The student's academic performance has been approved to play a pivotal role in primary education. However, the factors contributing to poor academic performance among primary school students have received little attention in Bhutanese contexts. To address this gap, this qualitative study examined the perspectives of 25 class 6 primary school students of 2023 regarding the factors influencing poor academic performance using open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis of data unveils various factors contributing to poor academic performance, categorized into four main themes: academic factors, socioeconomic factors, personal factors, and psychological factors. Academic factors emerged as the most prominent, with issues such as biased assessments, inadequate teaching methods, and limited access to resources significantly impeding students' learning experiences. Socioeconomic factors, including health disparities, financial constraints, and social relationships, further exacerbated academic challenges. Personal factors, such as academic engagement, individual characteristics, and physical health conditions, also significantly influenced students' academic outcomes. Although psychological factors were the least significant, they still impacted students' academic performance through emotional distress, lack of motivation, and low self-esteem. The study suggests that a multifaceted interplay of these factors affects academic performance. Addressing these multiple factors can foster an environment conducive to academic success and holistic development for all students. The study concludes with the practical implications of the findings and the direction for future research is discussed.

**Keywords:** academic factors, poor academic performance, personal factors, primary school, psychological factors, socioeconomic factors

### INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, ensuring optimal academic performance among school students stands as a fundamental objective. Hellas et al. (2018) defined academic performance as the level of achievement in meeting educational goals, often assessed through continuous evaluations and the overall cumulative grade point average (CGPA) obtained by students. Academic performance not only reflects the effectiveness of educational systems but also plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' future prospects and societal development (Ozcan, 2021). Moreover, previous studies have identified and explored diverse factors contributing to the enhancement of students' academic performance, categorizing them into academic-related, environment-related, personal, social, psychological, and economic domains (Adil et al., 2023; Chahal et al., 2022; Libed, 2022; Munir et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023).

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Investigating the factors related to student's poor academic performance has become a topic of increasing interest in education circles. For instance, Shahjahan et al. (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study in Bangladesh and identified several factors associated with poor academic performance among undergraduate students, including irregular class attendance, father's low education level, partial family cooperation, use of social media, and excessive time spent gossiping. Conversely, there is hardly any literature that has unravelled factors specifically contributing towards poor academic performance in primary schools elsewhere and in Bhutan.

Moreover, despite concerted efforts to enhance educational outcomes, class 6 students in the Thimphu District continue to grapple with the challenge of poor academic performance among primary school students. Thimphu District, located in the western part of Bhutan, serves as a capital and microcosm of the broader educational landscape in the country. Despite its strategic importance as the capital district, it confronts diverse issues contributing to poor academic performance among primary school students. Understanding the factors underlying this phenomenon is imperative for devising targeted interventions aimed at fostering educational excellence and holistic development. Furthermore, this research endeavours to explore the intricate factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of primary school students in Thimphu District. By examining into these factors, the study aims to shed light on the root causes of poor performance and provide insights that can inform evidence-based strategies for improvement.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the factors contributing to the poor academic performance of primary school students?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is guided by two theories: Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986) and Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

#### **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**

SCT emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between individuals, their environment, and their behaviour. In the context of academic performance, SCT suggests that students' academic achievement is influenced not only by their personal characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation) but also by environmental factors (e.g., family support, peer influence, school resources). The unique feature of SCT is the emphasis on social influence and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. SCT considers the unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behaviour, while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behaviour. The theory takes into account a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioural action will occur. This framework can help in understanding how various social and environmental factors impact students' academic performance in Thimphu District.

#### **Ecological Systems Theory (EST)**

This theory posits that individuals are influenced by multiple nested systems, including the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (interactions between different microsystems), exosystem (external environments indirectly affecting individuals), and macrosystem (cultural values and norms). This theory was influenced by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Lewin's behaviourism theory. Bronfenbrenner's research focused on the impact of social interaction on child development. Bronfenbrenner believed that a person's development was influenced by everything in the surrounding environment and social interactions within it. EST emphasizes that children are shaped by their interaction with others and the context. Applying this framework would involve

examining how factors at different levels, such as family dynamics, school environment, community support, and broader societal influences, contribute to poor academic performance among primary school students in Thimphu District.

### **Academic factors influencing poor academic performance**

There are various academic factors contributing to poor academic performance. These include teacher characteristics, teacher support, motivation, learning facilities, interaction, teaching methods and use of academic facilities (Adil et al., 2023). For example, Nevenglosky (2018) revealed that insufficient mastery of foundational concepts, often stemming from inadequate teaching methodologies or curriculum misalignment, can hinder students' academic progress. Additionally, limited access to educational resources, such as textbooks, technology, and supportive learning environments, exacerbates disparities in achievement (Johnson et al., 2022). Moreover, Hu et al. (2021) corroborate that diverse learning styles and individual cognitive differences necessitate tailored instructional approaches, yet standardized curricula may fail to accommodate these variations, impeding student engagement and comprehension. Libed (2022) identifies mental ability, personality, and study habits as factors affecting academic performance. Moreover, detrimental factors such as frequent absenteeism, lack of motivation, disliking the subject, inadequate campus accommodation, poor sanitation, poor library facilities, lack of teachers, and lack of seriousness among teachers significantly impact students' academic performance (Awal, 2022).

### **Socio-economic factors influencing poor academic performance**

Socio-economic factors play a pivotal role in influencing the academic performance of students. Extensive literature suggests that various socioeconomic backgrounds, family dynamics, peer pressure, and societal expectations significantly impact students' educational outcomes (Adil et al., 2023). Previous studies indicate that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often face challenges such as limited access to educational resources, inadequate parental support, inadequate nutrition, unstable home environments, and increased stress due to financial constraints, all of which can contribute to poor academic performance (Adil et al., 2023; Munir et al., 2023; Seyoum et al., 2019; Vadivel et al., 2023). For example, Munir et al. (2023) found that socioeconomic status profoundly impacts academic performance, with financial constraints impacting access to supplemental educational opportunities and resources, including parental involvement in education, family structure, and parenting styles, have been found to influence students' motivation, self-esteem, and overall academic achievement (Guillena et al., 2023). Conversely, family support, parental involvement, and a nurturing home environment correlate positively with academic success (Akrofi, 2020). Further, peer relationships and social interactions within school environments can either foster positive academic behaviours or lead to distractions and disengagement from learning (Zhou et al., 2023).

### **Personal factors influencing poor academic performance**

Prior studies suggest that various personal factors play significant roles in contributing to poor academic performance among students. Personal factors such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, birth order, mental ability, personality, and poor study habits have been identified as common barriers to academic success (Adil et al., 2023; Chahal et al., 2022; Grajek et al., 2022; Libed, 2022). For example, Libed (2022) claims that middle and firstborn students tend to have low academic performance. Additionally, students with poor study habits are more likely to have low academic performance (Chahal et al., 2022, Jafari et al., 2019). Moreover, personality factors such as affability and assertiveness have been found to be predictors of academic performance (Wang et al., 2023). The previous studies revealed that students' frequent absenteeism affects their academic performance (Keppens, 2023; Akkus & Çinkir, 2022). Additionally, individual differences in learning styles and cognitive abilities can influence a student's ability to comprehend and retain information effectively

(Kubat, 2018). Further, health-related issues such as chronic illnesses and mental health disorders can hinder a student's ability to fully engage in their studies (Grajek et al., 2022). The previous studies also revealed that poor quality sleep and altered sleep patterns have been positively associated with poor academic performance (Fernandez et al., 2023; Jalali et al., 2020, Toscano-Hermonso et al., 2020). Furthermore, Mallik (2023) found that some students' positive and negative relationships with teachers have no impact on their classroom engagement and academic achievement.

### **Psychological factors influencing poor academic performance**

Numerous studies have delved into the complex interplay of psychological factors contributing to poor academic performance among students (Alkhalaf, 2023; Kienngam et al., 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2021). Psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, and motivation also affect students' ability to perform academically (Kienngam et al., 2022; Pascoe et al., 2020). For example, Steinmayr et al. (2019) revealed that one recurrent theme is the impact of motivation on students' academic performance. Self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2020) posits that intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and enjoyment, yields better academic results than extrinsic motivation, such as rewards or punishments. Similarly, academic stress impedes strong academic performance, raises college dropout rates, lowers graduation rates, and diminishes self-confidence (Gobena, 2024). Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs, rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory, significantly influence academic achievement; students with low self-efficacy tend to underperform due to a lack of confidence in their abilities (Pajares, 1996). Additionally, chronic stressors, including academic pressure, societal expectations, and personal challenges, can affect cognitive functioning and hinder academic success (Deng et al., 2022). Moreover, Batool (2020) mentioned that positive parenting has been shown to impact students' motivation, self-esteem, and overall academic performance. Furthermore, factors like low self-esteem and negative self-perceptions create barriers to effective learning (Downey & Crummy, 2022).

## **METHOD**

### **Research context**

The present study was carried out in Bhutan, a country renowned for its focus on Gross National Happiness as the development philosophy (Rigdel & Thapa, 2024). The research context centres on exploring the factors contributing to the poor academic performance of primary school students in Thimphu District. Thimphu, as the capital city of Bhutan, represents a diverse educational landscape with various primary schools catering to a range of students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Despite the efforts of teachers and policymakers, there persists a concerning trend of poor academic performance among primary school students in the district. Understanding the underlying factors influencing this phenomenon is essential for devising effective interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes and fostering student success. Notably, Class 6 students in Bhutan sit for the common examination conducted by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA), which serves as a significant benchmark for evaluating academic proficiency.

### **Research design and participants**

The present study utilized the qualitative approach as it allows for a thorough exploration of the student's experiences, perspectives, and opinions related to their academic performance. Data gathering was conducted through self-reported methods, specifically open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews. The decision to utilize these tools stems from the intention to allow participants to express their responses freely through open-ended surveys, while semi-structured interviews aid in comprehending individual perspectives more thoroughly (McGrath et al., 2019). Although self-reported instruments are frequently criticized for their lack of accuracy and reliability, Westgate and Wilson (2018) propose that self-reported measures are the suitable approach for assessing an

individual student's factors linked to poor academic performance. This justification further supports the choice to utilize self-reported instruments in the current study.

Participants for this qualitative study were drawn from Class 6 students studying at two Primary Schools (PS1 & PS2) during the academic year 2023. The selection criteria were focused on students who did not achieve passing grades in the common examination administered for the year 2023. These criteria ensure that participants have experienced academic challenges reflective of the study's objectives. Additionally, parental or guardian consent was obtained before participation to uphold ethical standards and ensure the involvement of minors aligns with ethical guidelines. Convenience sampling was employed to select participants from the target population. This approach is chosen for its practicality and accessibility, considering the specific criteria for inclusion in the study. Additionally, this sampling approach aims to capture the perspectives and experiences of Class 6 students who faced academic difficulties in the specified timeframe, contributing valuable insights to the study's exploration of factors influencing poor academic performance.

### **Research instruments**

In line with the objectives and the research questions, the researchers, in this study, employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions to gather in-depth insights from the participants. The first phase of the interview unveiled the background information of the respondents. However, the second phase encompassed five open-ended questions, which probed students' perspectives on factors contributing to poor academic performance. The interviews were audio-recorded and conducted individually by the researchers at different times of the week depending on the respondents' schedules. Each interview session lasted around 30 minutes. It is worth mentioning that before cleaning the data, the content validity of the interview questions was examined by two experts with sufficient knowledge on the topic, and qualitative research. Moreover, both the instruments underwent pilot tests and minor modifications were made after analysing the pilot data. The primary aim of these pilot tests was to assess and validate the appropriateness of the questions formulated for this study. The data collected from these pilot participants was excluded from the final analysis of the study. During the interviews, the participants were free to talk about, elaborate, and bring examples related to the interview questions determined in advance.

### **Data collection procedure**

Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or guardians before participation. To collect the data, initially, the researchers perused the pertinent studies (Adil et al., 2023; Alos et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2022; Ozcan, 2021) to gain a general view of the factors affecting the academic performance of the students. Then based on their own experiences and the literature, ten interview questions and 5 open-ended questions were developed. Next, the questions were checked for content validity in a week by two experts. After receiving the experts' comments, one of the interview questions was removed and the rest were approved. Afterwards, the finalized questions were answered by 10 students from PS1 and 15 students from PS2 in open-ended questions electronically. The link for open-ended questions was shared using students' Gmail accounts personally and questions were translated in Dzongkha. The questions were translated into Dzongkha, considering that the participants are sixth-grade students, to ensure accurate data collection. Further, the interviews were carried out in a face-to-face manner during weekends. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes during which the participants were asked different questions regarding the factors contributing to poor academic performance. The researchers prompted the question whenever needed and participants were given a choice to either answer it in English or Dzongkha. Once the data were accumulated, the researchers transcribed the interviews' audio files using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps to thematic analysis. Moreover, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, with data anonymized during analysis and reporting.

### Data analysis

The data was analysed employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. This method enables the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and insights within the qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions. The six steps involve familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. Initially, both researchers collaborated to process and transcribe the data obtained from open-ended questions and interviews. Subsequently, the transcribed data was shared with all participants via Gmail for member checking, aiding the researchers in verifying the authenticity, credibility, and accuracy of the transcriptions. Following this, the initial coding process involved multiple readings and re-readings of the transcriptions (including data from open-ended questions and interviews), utilizing constant comparative analysis. The adoption of constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was chosen for its ability to enable researchers to compare different data segments (such as codes) to enhance their significance, thus reducing potential researcher biases. However, during the coding phase, the researchers worked independently to establish intercoder reliability (ICR). According to O'Connor and Joffe (2020), the involvement of at least two coders is essential for ensuring the establishment of ICR.

During the process of searching, reviewing, defining, and naming themes, as well as generating the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the researchers independently conducted theme identification, reviewed, defined, and named the themes, and created the report using codes. However, the identified themes underwent a comparative and re-evaluation process by both researchers together, involving multiple readings to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the themes. Additionally, an audit trail was conducted where research participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings, while also assessing potential researcher biases. To facilitate this, the final themes and codes agreed upon by both researchers were shared with the participants via email, accompanied by a Google Form, enabling participants to express their agreement or disagreement with the findings. Hence, the results presented in this paper were deemed as a valid, accurate, and reliable representation of the present participants. The condensed thematic analysis is provided in Table 1 to Table 4 below.

### FINDINGS

The qualitative data was quantified through Frequency Count (FC), which involved tallying the number of participants and their percentage who mentioned similar or identical representative codes related to factors contributing to poor academic performance. Additionally, excerpts from semi-structured interviews were integrated to support the open-ended findings. This process resulted in the identification of four overarching themes or factors contributing to poor academic performance, namely academic, socioeconomic, personal and psychological factors (see Table 1-4).

Table 1

Academic factors contributing to poor academic performance

Factors	Themes (Frequency Counts)	Sub-themes
	Assessment and Evaluation (22)	Assessment fairness and study culture
Academic	Teaching and learning environment (18)	Teacher characteristics and teaching method
	Academic Facilities and Resources (14)	Poor science laboratory facilities and limited access to ICT lab

The findings reveal several academic factors contributing to poor academic performance, including issues related to assessment and evaluation, the teaching and learning environment, and inadequacies in academic facilities and resources. The majority of the participants in this study (95.7%) reported that they perceive issues with the fairness of assessments and the prevailing study culture. For instance, interview participants (P1,P2,P3,P4,P5) shared their concerns about biased grading, unclear evaluation criteria, or a culture that prioritizes rote memorization over critical thinking. Following

that, 78.3% of participants reported that they felt that the teaching and learning environment had contributed to their poor academic performance. Interview participants (P1,P4,P5) articulated that teachers' behaviour, such as being supportive, humorous, and happy, positively impacts their learning experience. P3 and P6 echoed that teachers primarily use the lecture method which impacts their engagement and learning outcomes, as some of us may benefit more from alternative teaching methods. The third most common sub-factors (60.9%) as reported by the present participants were the academic facilities and resources. The finding suggests that poor science laboratory facilities have impacted students' practical learning experiences, particularly in science. For instance, P4 said, "Actually, I love learning by doing. Our science teacher hardly takes us for experiments in the science lab." Moreover, the finding also indicates that limited access to ICT labs has hindered students' exposure to digital tools and resources essential for their academic growth.

Table 2

**Socioeconomic factors contributing to poor academic performance**

Factors	Themes (Frequency Counts)	Sub-themes
	Health and Well-being (22)	Inadequate nutrition
Socioeconomic	Access to Resources (19)	Limited access to educational resources and financial constraints
	Social Relationships (16)	Peer relationships

The findings reveal several socioeconomic factors contributing to poor academic performance, including issues related to health and well-being, access to resources and support, and social relationships. The participants (97.7%) suggest that poor nutrition negatively impacts students' health and overall well-being, which in turn can affect their academic performance. The majority of the interview participants (P1-P6) shared that inadequate nutrition can lead to issues such as fatigue, poor concentration, and compromised cognitive function. Another factor that contributed to students' poor academic performance was access to resources (82.6%). Additionally, 15% of the participants highlighted the impact of financial limitations on their academic performance. P3,P4,P5 echoed that financial constraints prevented them from accessing educational resources, participating in extracurricular activities, or receiving additional support such as tuition. Further, 69.6% of participants show that peer interactions and relationships influence students' academic performance. P3 opined, "Positive peer relationships can provide us with support and encouragement, while negative relationships or peer pressure can distract us from our studies."

Table 3

**Personal factors contributing to poor academic performance**

Factors	Themes (Frequency Counts)	Sub-themes
	Academic Engagement and Performance (21)	Attitude towards subjects and poor study habits
Personal	Individual Characteristics and Circumstances (16)	Birth order and different learning styles
	Physical Health and Well-being (10)	Chronic illness and poor sleep quality

The study reveals several personal factors contributing to poor academic performance, including issues related to academic engagement and performance, individual characteristics and circumstances, and physical health and well-being. The majority of the participants (91.3%) suggest that poor academic engagement and performance contribute to poor academic performance. 14% of participants show that their attitudes and perceptions towards different subjects can affect their academic performance. P1,P2,P4 shared that positive attitudes lead to greater engagement and success, while negative attitudes hinder their learning and performance. Moreover, 16% of participants highlight the importance of effective study habits in academic success. For instance, P6 echoed, "Most of the time, I procrastinate, lack organization, and inefficient study techniques impede my ability to learn and perform well in assessments." Additionally, 69.6% of the participants reveal that poor physical health

and well-being contribute to poor academic performance. The finding suggests that birth order within a family might influence students' academic performance. Further, the finding shows that students' preferred learning styles may not always align with traditional teaching methods, leading to challenges in understanding and retaining information. Furthermore, 43.5% of the participants indicate that students with chronic health conditions face challenges in maintaining consistent academic performance. P3 shared, "I have health issues which can lead to missed classes, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating." Finally, the finding indicates the importance of adequate sleep in supporting academic success.

Table 4  
Psychological factors contributing to poor academic performance

Factors	Themes (Frequency Counts)	Sub-themes
Psychological	Emotional Distress (13)	Stress, anxiety and depression
	Motivational Factors (12)	Lack of motivation and no personal interest and enjoyment in learning
	Self-Perception and Beliefs (7)	Low self-efficacy beliefs and low self-esteem

The study reveals several psychological factors contributing to poor academic performance, including issues related to emotional distress, motivational factors, and self-perception and beliefs. Most of the participants (56.5%) felt that they suffered emotional distress such as stress, anxiety and depression. The finding suggests that stress and anxiety, whether related to academic workload, personal issues, or external pressures, can negatively impact students' academic performance. P4 echoed, "The persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or lack of interest, can significantly affect my motivation, energy levels, and academic engagement." Additionally, 52.2 % of participants claimed that motivational factors contribute to poor academic performance. The finding suggests that a lack of intrinsic motivation or interest in learning can contribute to poor academic performance. For instance, P1, P3, P4, P6 shared, "When we lack motivation, we struggle to engage with academic material, complete assignments, or pursue academic goals." The finding also shows that students' lack of personal interest or enjoyment in academic subjects can hinder their engagement and investment in learning activities. Finally, 30.4% of the participants felt that self-perception and beliefs contribute to poor academic performance. The finding indicates that students' beliefs about their ability to succeed academically (self-efficacy) can impact their motivation, effort, and persistence in learning tasks. The finding shows that students' overall self-esteem and self-worth influence their academic performance. P6 articulated that low self-esteem can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and reluctance to engage in academic activities.

## DISCUSSION

The present study examined the factors contributing to poor academic performance from the perspective of primary school students. In doing this, the findings of this study revealed five factors (see Table 1- Table 4). The factors are discussed below in the light of SCT, EST and previous studies.

### Academic-related factors

The first finding of the present study identified academic factors as one of the factors contributing to poor academic performance. This finding was consistent with the findings of many previous studies (Adil et al., 2023; Alani & Hawas, 2021; Libed, 2022). This study also identified three sub-factors which include assessment and evaluation, the teaching and learning environment, and inadequacies in academic facilities and resources. The findings reveal that the assessment and evaluation were not fair. Our participants shared that they were exposed to biased grading and unclear evaluation criteria.

The study reveals that teachers' characteristics, support and teaching methods contribute to poor academic performance. The findings align with Adil et al. (2023) and Johnson et al. (2016) who found that teacher characteristics and teaching methods contribute to poor academic performance. The



interview participants also shared that teachers' behaviour, such as being supportive, humorous, and happy, positively impacts their learning experience. Similarly, the finding was congruent with Nevenglosky (2018) who pointed out that a lack of thorough understanding of basic principles, sometimes resulting from ineffective teaching methods can impede students' academic advancement.

The present study also reveals that the lack of academic facilities and resources such as poor science laboratory facilities and limited access to ICT labs contributes to poor academic performance. The finding is also in line with Awal (2022), who provided evidence that inadequate laboratory facilities contribute to poor academic performance by depriving students of supplementary educational resources for research and exploration. The finding aligns with Adil et al. (2023), who suggest that restricted access to ICT labs has hindered students' exposure to digital tools and resources crucial for their academic development. However, it was intriguing to discover that students have sufficient textbooks and classrooms, a contrast to the findings of previous studies (Adil et al., 2023; Awal, 2022; Johnson et al., 2022).

### **Socioeconomic-related factors**

Another factor contributing to students' poor academic performance was socioeconomic factors (Adil et al., 2023; Munir et al., 2023; Vadivel et al., 2023). The findings reveal three sub-factors which affect students' poor academic performance, including health and well-being, access to resources and social relationships. The finding is in line with Seyoum et al. (2019), who have demonstrated that malnutrition has a detrimental impact on students' academic performance. Similarly, most of the interview participants expressed that insufficient nutrition can result in problems such as fatigue, diminished concentration, and impaired cognitive function.

In line with Munir et al. (2023) and Vadivel et al. (2023), access to resources was another sub-factor that contributed to students' poor academic performance. The study revealed that socioeconomic status has a significant impact on academic performance, with financial limitations identified as a key factor contributing to students' poor academic performance. The finding resonates with Munir et al. (2023), who noted that financial limitations affect students' ability to access additional educational opportunities and resources, consequently influencing their academic performance. Additionally, the interview participants reiterated that financial constraints hindered their access to educational resources, involvement in extracurricular activities, and additional support such as tutoring.

Findings also revealed that inadequate social relationships contribute to poor academic performance. The finding is congruent with Zhou et al. (2023), who found that peer relationships and social interactions in school settings can either promote favourable academic behaviours or result in distractions and disengagement from learning. Similarly, an interview participant expressed, "Having positive peer relationships can offer us support and motivation, whereas negative relationships or peer pressure can divert our focus from our academic pursuits."

### **Personal-related Factors**

Another factor contributing to students' poor academic performance was personal factors such as academic engagement and performance, individual characteristics and circumstances, and physical health and well-being (Adil et al., 2023; Chahal et al., 2022; Grajek et al., 2022; Libed, 2022). The findings indicate that students' attitudes and perspectives toward various subjects can influence their academic performance. Interview participants revealed that maintaining positive attitudes fosters increased engagement and success, whereas negative attitudes impede their learning and performance. The findings also suggest that students have poor study habits which leads to poor academic performance. Additionally, previous studies indicate that students with insufficient study habits are more prone to experiencing low academic performance (Chahal et al., 2022; Jafari et al., 2019). One

interviewee emphasized that ineffective study methods hinder their capacity to learn and excel in assessments.

The findings suggest that individual characteristics also contribute to poor academic performance. The finding is congruent with Libed (2022), who suggests that middle and firstborn students often exhibit lower academic performance. The open-ended questionnaire reported that 60% of the respondents identified as firstborn, while 10% identified as middleborn. The finding is also in line with Kubat (2018), who affirmed that individual variances in learning styles can impact a student's capacity to understand and retain information effectively. Both the responses from the open-ended questionnaire and the interviews indicated that participants possess various learning styles that are not adequately addressed by their teachers.

Moreover, the findings suggest that students dealing with chronic health issues encounter obstacles in maintaining steady academic performance. The finding echoes Grajek et al. (2022) who asserted that health-related challenges such as chronic illnesses can impede a student's capacity to actively participate in their academic endeavours. Similarly, a participant in the interview expressed, "My health concerns often cause me to miss classes, feel fatigued, and have trouble focusing in class." The finding indicates the importance of adequate sleep in supporting academic success. Consistent with the findings of Jalali et al. (2020), reduced overnight sleep or disrupted sleep patterns have been linked to significant drowsiness and academic underachievement. Likewise, the findings are consistent with Toscano-Hermoso et al. (2020) and Fernandez et al. (2023), who identified a positive correlation between sleep quality and academic performance.

### **Psychological-related factors**

The study unveils various psychological factors that contribute to poor academic performance, encompassing concerns regarding emotional well-being, motivation, and self-perception and beliefs. The findings indicated that participants experienced emotional distress such as stress, anxiety and depression which affected their academic performance. The findings are consistent with the findings of Kiennngam et al. (2022) and Pascoe et al. (2020), indicating that psychological aspects such as stress, anxiety, and depression intersect with the environment, impacting students' academic performance. Similarly, academic stress hinders performance, increases dropout rates, lowers graduation rates, and reduces self-confidence (Gobena, 2024).

Moreover, the findings also reveal that motivational factors contribute to poor academic performance. The finding suggests that a lack of intrinsic motivation or interest in learning can contribute to poor academic performance. Our finding aligns with Ryan and Deci's (2020) which suggests that internal motivation, stemming from personal interest and enjoyment, leads to superior academic outcomes compared to external motivation. Additionally, the interviewees expressed that a deficiency in motivation hinders their ability to interact with academic content, fulfil assignments, or pursue academic goals. Likewise, one of the interviewees echoed the sentiment that continual experiences of sadness, hopelessness, or a lack of interest have a substantial effect on their motivation, energy levels, and engagement in academic activities.

Finally, the findings reveal that self-perception and beliefs contribute to poor academic performance. The finding indicates that students' self-efficacy can impact their motivation, effort, and persistence in learning tasks. The findings align with Pajares (1996) and Bandura (1986), who confirmed that self-efficacy beliefs significantly impact academic achievement, with students exhibiting low self-efficacy tending to underperform due to a lack of confidence in their abilities. Similarly, Hayat et al. (2020) asserted that self-efficacy positively influences academic performance when it is mediated by positive emotion and metacognitive learning strategies. Additionally, the finding shows that students' overall self-esteem and self-worth influence their academic performance. The findings align with Downey and Crummy (2022) corroborated that low self-esteem creates barriers to effective learning. Similarly,

the interviewees expressed that low self-esteem can lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and reluctance to engage in academic activities

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that there is a multifaceted interplay of academic, socioeconomic, personal, and psychological factors among primary school students contributing to poor academic performance. Academic factors such as biased assessment, inadequate teaching methods, and limited access to resources significantly impede students' learning experiences and outcomes. Socioeconomic factors, including health disparities, financial constraints and social relationships, further exacerbate academic challenges. Additionally, personal factors such as academic engagement, individual characteristics, and health conditions significantly influence students' ability to succeed academically, emphasizing the importance of addressing individual needs. Lastly, psychological factors such as emotional distress, motivation, and self-perception highlight the significance of addressing students' holistic well-being to foster academic success.

These findings have several implications for educational stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners. Firstly, interventions targeting academic improvement should address the identified factors comprehensively. This includes implementing pedagogical reforms such as differentiated instruction to cater to diverse learning needs, integrating technology to enhance learning experiences, and developing curricula that are culturally relevant and engaging. Resource allocation should focus on providing adequate teaching materials, access to libraries and learning aids, and improving school infrastructure. Teacher training programs should emphasize modern teaching methodologies, classroom management techniques, and continuous professional development to enhance instructional quality and promote equitable learning opportunities.

Efforts to mitigate socioeconomic disparities should include strategies to provide essential resources such as school supplies, nutritious meals, and healthcare services. Parental involvement programs that educate parents on supporting their children's education and create strong home-school partnerships are crucial. Support services such as after-school tutoring, mentorship programs, and scholarships can help ensure all students have access to the necessary materials for academic success. Moreover, personalized support systems tailored to students' individual needs are essential for fostering holistic development and overcoming barriers to learning. This includes academic support like tutoring and remedial classes, mental health services such as counselling and stress management trainings, and family interventions that address home environment challenges. Schools should also implement early identification and intervention programs to support students with learning difficulties and special needs. Furthermore, creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that prioritize positive relationships, inclusive practices, and physical well-being can enhance students' academic engagement and overall educational outcomes. Initiatives like anti-bullying campaigns, peer mentoring, and extracurricular activities that promote social skills and teamwork are important. Schools should also ensure a safe and healthy physical environment, including clean facilities, playgrounds, and sports programs to support physical well-being.

## SUGGESTIONS

Future research could encompass longitudinal studies to track the academic performance and associated factors of primary school students over time. This would help in understanding how various factors change and impact students' academic outcomes throughout their primary education journey. Moreover, examining the effectiveness of specific interventions targeting the identified factors contributing to poor academic performance, such as academic support programs, counselling services, or community support initiatives, can provide insights into best practices for addressing students' challenges. Furthermore, expanding the scope of the research to comprise students from

other districts or regions in Bhutan can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at a national level. Additionally, comparative analysis with other countries facing similar challenges can offer valuable perspectives and potential solutions for addressing poor academic performance.

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