

Peer Support and Academic Performance among Undergraduate Students in Public Sector Universities: A Gender-Based Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT: The study investigated students' perceptions regarding peer support and academic performance in public sector universities. The objectives were to assess the level of peer support and academic performance, analyze the relationship between peer support and academic performance, and examine gender differences in both variables. The sample comprised 250 students from public sector universities. A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect data regarding peer support, while academic performance was measured through students' CGPA. The reliability of the instrument, measured through Cronbach's α , was 0.779. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including means, standard deviations, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-test, were used for data analysis. The findings indicated that peer support was not significantly related to academic performance at the university level. The mean score for peer support was 3.55 (SD = 0.604), whereas the mean score for academic performance was 2.86 (SD = 0.505). The results further revealed a negative but statistically nonsignificant relationship between peer support and academic performance ($r = -0.101$, $p = 0.111$), indicating that higher peer support was not associated with better academic performance. The study also found no significant difference in academic performance between male and female students ($t = 0.512$, $p = 0.609$). Similarly, no significant gender difference was found in peer support, although male students reported slightly higher peer support than female students ($t = 1.91$, $p = 0.057$). The findings suggest that academic performance in public sector universities may be influenced by factors other than peer support, and gender does not significantly affect either peer support or academic performance.

KEYWORDS: Peer Support, Academic Performance, Public Sector Universities

Introduction

University life offers many opportunities that enhance cognitive skills and support social and emotional growth. Peer support is considered an important aspect of university life because it can affect students' social adjustment and

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academic success. During university, students spend much of their time with peers, classmates, and friends both in and outside of the classroom. These friendships can be a valuable source of help when facing academic stress, emotional challenges, teamwork, or adjusting to university life. Peer support in university can be defined as the unconditional assistance received from peers or friends in areas like academics, emotional support, sharing information, or social adjustment. This can also be seen in other forms, such as preparing and exchanging lecture notes, discussing course material, helping each other understand challenging subject matter, studying for exams together, and being extra supportive throughout their university life. It can also involve patiently listening to each other's reservations, supporting each other during poor grades, and thus establishing a new community within the university setting.

University life is often challenging and fraught with transitions, and supportive peer relationships can help students feel connected, academically motivated, stay positive about themselves, and capable of coping with academic stress (Wentzel, 2025). In higher education, there has been a growing interest in peer support as learning at this level is not the production of individual efforts, but rather it is an outcome of interaction with others. Discussions, observation, study groups, and collective academic experiences are common methods for learning for students. Classmate attitudes and behaviors may affect the attitudes of students, their attitudes toward academic activities, and the level of their participation in classroom activities. Positive peer interaction can reinforce study skills, enhance participation in learning, and foster learning through collaboration. For some students, friends in class are the first place they turn to for assistance when they find themselves struggling to grasp concepts in lectures, to finish assignments, or to fit into the University's expectations. Peer support, therefore, can be viewed as a valuable learning tool rather than just a learning support, and is also a tool that can assist with adjustment and the overall university experience for students (Moll, 2025).

No single factor accounts for academic achievement on its own; motivation, self-regulation, study habits, family background, teacher support, and learning resources all influence academic outcomes. In addition to these, the importance of peer relationships has been gaining increasing recognition as students deal with numerous academic issues in a social context, not alone. When students have peers who encourage them to learn, exchange ideas, and help them practically, they might be more motivated to attend classes, complete assignments, and stay on task. Having peers who encourage students to learn, exchange ideas with them, and help them out practically, students might be more motivated to attend classes, do their assignments, and stay on task when it becomes difficult to take on an academic task. Conversely, students who feel socially isolated or unsupported can have reduced motivation, increased stress, and reduced engagement in their studies. In either case, peer support can have direct and indirect impacts on academic achievement (Yuliawati et al., 2025).

Peer support can be helpful in a number of ways for academic achievement. Collaborative academic assistance, like helping to understand difficult concepts, sharing notes, and studying together, can help students master course content and prepare for exams. Emotional support can also help to alleviate stress, anxiety, and academic pressures, which can help students focus on their studies. Meanwhile, peer support can boost confidence, perseverance, and drive to achieve academic objectives. When students feel supported, they are likely to ask questions, get clarification, and participate in classroom activities. Peer groups can also foster a sense of responsibility and encourage students to go to class regularly, turn in assignments on time, and develop good study habits. Therefore, peer support can affect academic performance not only through its role in enhancing students' learning but also through its emotional and motivational impact on academic success (Qing & Wahid, 2025).

Peer support may become more apparent in Public Sector Universities. Many students receive higher education from these institutions, and many of them are from developing countries where university education is linked to the public sector, which is not easily affordable. Learners in such universities are frequently from a variety of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, and many experience difficulties with regard to limited resources, large class size, financial pressure, transport issues, and difficulties settling in. At times, however, formal institutional support may not be sufficient to address the needs of each learner in a comprehensive manner in these contexts. Consequently, classmates and friends can be a valuable source of informal guidance and support to help students cope better in their university life (Yang & Xiang, 2025).

In public sector universities, peers can even play a significant role for students in adjusting and persisting in academia. Students can rely on each other for guidance in establishing the course's expectations, studying for tests, attending lessons, and even comprehending the University's protocols. They can also look for emotional support from their peers at times of stress, such as exams, assignment deadlines, and personal issues. Peer support might help to minimize isolation and enhance a sense of belonging for students in settings in which limited facilities and many students can make students feel as though they are "out of sight, out of mind". This support can help create a more positive learning experience and also have an impact on academic results. Peer support in public sector universities is significant because the context of these universities can have an impact on the nature or role of peer support (Hassan et al., 2025).

While the importance of social support in students' learning results has been highlighted in previous studies, the relationship between social support from peers and students' learning performance needs to be further studied in the context of public sector universities. The existing research has investigated a wider range of concepts, including social support, student engagement, and learning environment, and less attention has been paid to the specific connection between peer support and academic achievement in institutions that have fewer resources and a more varied population and demographics. Moreover, the impact of peer support can differ in various educational contexts and across cultural and institutional contexts. Thus, what is learned in one context will not necessarily be applicable in another. Public sector universities are a unique environment where the relationships among the students may be more important, as they are likely to be more dependent on each other for academic and emotional support. Taking these concerns into consideration, the present study was designed to explore the relationship between peer support and the academic performance of students in the public sector universities. The emphasis of the study is to examine students' experiences in this context and the potential role of peer relationships in students' achievement. The results can also be helpful for policymakers, university administrators, and educators who are keen to enhance peer mentoring, collaborative learning, and student support programs within higher education (Shahzad & Gull, 2025).

University life is greatly influenced by interactions with classmates and friends, and peer support is generally seen as part of the students' experiences in higher education. Students learn not just from their teachers and formal teaching, but also in discussion, cooperation, and by interacting with their peers in everyday activities. Peer support means academic, emotional, and social help given to students by other students. This could be discussing notes, clarifying challenging material, studying for exams together, assisting with homework, and supporting each other through challenging times at school. It can also include listening to the person's problem, providing consolation following poor school grades, and establishing a feeling of belonging within the university setting. Peer support is important in higher education because learning is not only an individual process, but also a social process. Pupils tend to learn more when they can share ideas, work on shared problems, and share differing perspectives with peers. Social interaction, consequently, is an important part of students' learning and adjustment. In addition to academic achievement, the ability to adjust to the environment and to feel a sense of connection to the people around them is

important in the success of the university. Having peers to support them can boost students' confidence, reduce their sense of isolation, and encourage them to participate in learning activities (Zhu et al., [2025](#)).

Peer support may be especially useful for students who are entering university and struggling with the higher education demands. Going to university is often stressful and can involve new routines, deadlines, assignments, and exams. In these cases, supportive classmates and friends can make it more manageable, as they can provide practical and emotional assistance. Research has found that peer relationships enhance a sense of belonging and that a sense of belonging can influence engagement, persistence, and commitment to studies. Peer support can also help students to develop healthier study habits. Sometimes students do not understand a subject matter and seek clarification from other students. Group study, note sharing, and discussion can enhance academic involvement and class and exam preparation. Peer support helps not just with learning, but also in a positive and manageable university experience. This makes it a significant social and academic determinant for higher education (Francis et al., [2025](#)).

Academic performance is a key measure of a student's success in college or university, as it reflects the extent to which they are achieving their educational objectives and standards. A university-level academic assessment may include grades, CGPA, test scores, class attendance, and assignment completion, or other academic or school requirements. Academic performance is important as it not only reflects on the progression of students' learning and success but also determines future educational and career opportunities. A variety of factors influence students' achievement, which is not determined by intelligence alone. Academic results are shaped by a variety of personal, social, and institutional factors. Personal factors can include motivation, self-confidence, planning time, study skills, and coping with school demands. Social influences are support from family, teachers and peers, and institutional influences are the quality of teaching, learning environment, classroom conditions and availability of educational resources. These factors are interdependent, and it is better to understand academic performance as the result of several interacting factors (Galseku et al., [2026](#)).

Studies in higher education have consistently indicated that students achieve greater success when they have positive attitudes towards learning, good study habits and strong academic abilities. Self-efficacy, motivation and effort regulation have also been found to be related to academic success in university students, as well as regular attendance. From these findings, it can be concluded that students will succeed if they have motivation, organization, and self-confidence in their ability to perform academic tasks. Meanwhile, students' achievement is also influenced by the social context in which they learn. Students learn in a web of relationships with teachers, peers, and friends that can shape their learning, engagement, and motivation. Positive and supportive relationships can enhance students' motivation to learn, while stressful relationships, a lack of support, and negative learning experiences can have the opposite effect on motivation. This indicates that the educational and social environment within the university is as important as individual effort in achieving academic success (Fenollar et al., [2007](#)).

With students engaging in a considerable amount of time in class contact with their friends and peers in the university, a relationship between peer and academic performance has become a topic of research interest within the university education sector. Such connections can influence students' drive, self-assurance, methods for studying, and involvement in academic pursuits. Peer support can benefit the students in many ways, including offering academic advice, encouraging them, and fostering a sense of belonging in the university setting. Due to these potential benefits, there has been greater interest in the relationship between peer support and students' academic achievement. Peer support can have a direct impact on academic performance, one of the most obvious ways being through academic assistance. Students frequently engage in classmate interaction to communicate material learned in class, clarify concepts, take notes, study for tests, and complete homework. Learning with peers can be more active

and improve students' understanding. Pupils who are supported academically by fellow pupils may feel more confident to discuss coursework and academic requirements. Peer support thus has a direct impact on improved learning outcomes (Ashwin, 2003).

Emotional and motivational pathways are another way peer support can affect academic performance. The college experience can lead to stress due to exams, deadlines, competition, and adjustment issues. By providing encouragement, listening to problems, and helping students feel understood, supportive peers will help to lower stress, loneliness, and anxiety. If pupils feel emotionally supported in school, they might feel more relaxed, motivated, and able to concentrate on their learning. Peer support can also enhance academic involvement and belonging. Students who feel a sense of belonging to their classmates are more likely to reach out for assistance, engage in class discussion, attend lectures, and get involved in academic activities. Peer groups can also instigate positive study habits by encouraging students to turn in work on time and to have regular study schedules. Peer support can be important in academic outcomes through these academic, emotional, and motivational processes (Bradley et al., 2021).

Previous studies have largely confirmed the positive correlation between peer support and academic achievement. Research has indicated that pupils' learning is enhanced by positive emotional support from peers and adults, practical support, and a feeling of belonging. Social and academic integration are other factors that have been cited as significant to student persistence and achievement in higher education. Peer support is not always a direct link to achievement, however, as peer influence can be positive or negative. A positive climate in which students are surrounded by peers who value learning, encourage learning, and promote responsible academic actions could positively impact student performance. Peer groups that distract students, encourage absenteeism, or show low interest in academic studies can hurt students' academic performance. Thus, peer support can manifest in various ways, depending on the quality, intent, and content of peer relationships.

Peer support could be particularly relevant in public sector universities where students experience academic, financial, and structural problems that impact their learning experiences. Public sector institutions in many developing countries cater to a large and diverse student population, with slim budgets and limited academic and counselling resources. The students of these universities might face the problem of overcrowded classrooms, limited access to learning materials, transportation issues, financial burden, and family responsibilities. In such situations, peers' informal support could be of real help in providing academic guidance and emotional encouragement. Peer support can manifest in numerous ways in universities that are part of the public sector. Students are expected to rely on their fellow students for information about lectures, exchange notes, discuss assignments, prepare for examinations, and assist them with information about the university. This support can be particularly beneficial for students from rural communities, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with less prepared school experiences. Students may be able to build confidence, expand knowledge of course material, enhance emotional stability, persist, and show academic growth through friendships and cooperative relationships (Osborn et al., 2022).

Peer belonging is also likely to be more salient in the public sector university context. During difficult times in the school year, when formal support is limited, peers and social networks are likely to be among the first places students turn. In terms of educational outcomes, supportive peer relationships can help decrease the sense of isolation, enhance the transition to university life, and increase students' motivation. Peer support can therefore assist students in coping with constraints of the institution and enhance their educational resilience. Despite this significance, research specifically focused on peer support and academic performance at public universities in Pakistan remains limited. Existing literature tends to talk about social support, student engagement, or school-level peer relations in general and not explicitly with respect to peer support in public sector HE settings. The differences

between public and private institutions in terms of resources, students' background, institutional culture, and support services require attention in a study of public sector universities as a separate context (Räsänen et al., 2021).

The Present Study

The literature reviewed indicated the significance of peer support in the social and academic contexts of higher education. Previous research indicates that supportive peer relationships might facilitate students' learning engagement, motivation, adjustment, and, in some instances, academic performance. Concurrently, studies on academic performance have consistently revealed that the personal, psychological, social, and institutional factors are all important in determining students' performance. In this context, peer support is a variable that might be worth exploring in more detail (Parmar et al., 2025).

There is, however, a significant gap associated with public sector universities, especially in the context of developing countries, where students might experience challenges in their academic and institutional lives that could have the effect of enhancing the importance of relying on peer networks. The existing literature has examined social support, student engagement, and academic achievement, but fewer studies have investigated specifically the relationship between peer support and student academic performance in public sector higher education institutions. Furthermore, peer support is frequently mentioned as a component of social support instead of being treated as a separate phenomenon that has academic value. This means that more research is needed that is relevant to particular contexts, and that investigates whether students' experiences of peer support are correlated with academic outcomes. So, the present study was designed to investigate the association between peer support and students' academic performance in the public sector universities. The study aims to make a contribution to the scholarship around higher education and its institutions by drawing on students' reflections and offering evidence of the academic importance of peer relationships in a public sector context. The results can also be used to inform the design of teacher and university environments and to inform policymakers on how to promote supportive peer environments to enhance student learning and academic outcomes (Fallon et al., 2023).

Academic achievement is broadly recognized as a predictor of success in college, but a number of factors at the personal, social, and institutional levels can affect a student's academic performance. Peer support is one of these influences that has garnered interest, as university students spend a substantial portion of their academic experience in the company of their classmates and friends, and these relationships can impact students' sense of motivation, learning, and adaptation to the university environment. Peer support can be a significant source of academic and emotional support through note sharing, discussion of course content, encouragement during stressful times, and assistance with academic tasks. While it is commonly believed that peer support has a positive impact on academic achievement, past research has yielded conflicting findings, and the influence of peer support is not always evident in every educational context. This issue becomes particularly important in public sector universities, where students may experience academic pressure, limited resources, and adjustment difficulties that could increase the value of peer relationships. Despite this, limited evidence is available on how peer support is related to academic performance in public sector universities and whether male and female students differ in these variables. Therefore, the current study was undertaken to assess the level of peer support and academic success, explore the relationship between these two variables, and determine gender differences among students in public sector universities.

Research Objectives & Research Questions

The research objectives of the study were to:

- ▶ Assess the level of peer support among students in public sector universities.
- ▶ Examine the level of academic performance among students in public sector universities.
- ▶ Analyze the relationship between peer support and academic performance in public sector universities.
- ▶ Explore the significant differences in peer support based on gender among students in public sector universities
- ▶ Determine the significant differences in academic performance based on gender among students in public sector universities

The following research questions were kept in mind while conducting this research:

- ▶ What is the level of peer support among students in public sector universities?
- ▶ What is the level of academic performance among students in public sector universities?
- ▶ Is there any relationship between peer support and academic performance in public sector universities?
- ▶ Are there significant differences in peer support based on gender among students in public sector universities?
- ▶ Are there significant differences in academic performance based on gender among students in public sector universities?

Methodology

Nature of the Study

The study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between peer support and students' academic performance in public sector universities. The data collection techniques employed were a survey technique, which involved the use of a structured questionnaire to elicit students' perceptions about the existence of peer support and academic performance, including students' CGPA.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of all undergraduate students currently enrolled in Social Sciences and Natural Sciences programs at the University of Education, Faisalabad Campus, and Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF). A simple random sampling technique was used to select a total of 250 students from both institutions, with efforts made to ensure balanced representation across gender and disciplinary streams (Social Sciences and Natural Sciences).

Instrument of the Study

A self-developed questionnaire was used as the research instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was designed to measure peer support among students in public sector universities. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Academic performance was measured separately through students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). The questionnaire was reviewed by experts to ensure its content validity and suitability for the study.

Reliability/Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert opinion. The questionnaire was examined by experts in the field of education to assess the clarity and relevance of the items. The reliability of the Peer Support Scale (PSS) was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Students' academic performance was measured through their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). The reliability coefficient is shown below:

Table 1

Reliability Statistics of Peer Support Scale (PSS)

No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
13	0.779

Data Collection/ Analysis

Data were collected from undergraduate students of the University of Education (UE), Faisalabad Campus, and Government College University Faisalabad (GCUF) through a self-developed questionnaire. Prior permission was obtained from the concerned departments before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all students were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent; the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses were assured throughout. The questionnaire was personally administered to the students, and they were informed about the purpose of the study. The collected data were entered and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to describe the data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between peer support and students' academic performance.

Table 2

Peer Support in Public Sector Universities (N=250)

Statements	Mean	SD
My peers help me understand difficult topics in class.	3.96	1.02
I ask for help from my peers concerning questions related to studying.	3.46	1.13
I share notes and study resources with my peers.	3.54	1.20
Conversations with peers support me in my studies.	3.36	1.19
Working together with peers improves my understanding of the subject.	3.52	1.04
My peers respect my opinions during discussions and group activities.	3.50	1.10
I feel supported by classmates to participate actively in learning.	3.50	1.19
I enjoy working with peers on group projects and activities.	3.51	1.28
My siblings support me in my academic efforts.	4.04	.960
I often prepare for the exam together with my peers.	3.42	1.23
Peer support is important in studying.	3.49	1.11
My peers encourage me when I face difficulties at the university level.	3.47	1.17
My peers give helpful advice on how to manage university life.	3.42	1.28

The results presented in Table 2 showed the levels of peer support reported by students in public sector universities. The highest mean score was reported for Family Support for Academic Achievement ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.96$), followed by Peer Assistance in Understanding Academic Concepts ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.02$), indicating that students receive considerable academic support from both family members and peers. Other highly rated aspects of peer support included Sharing Academic Resources and Study Materials ($M = 3.54$), Collaborative Learning and Knowledge Development ($M = 3.52$), Positive Experiences in Group Learning Activities ($M = 3.51$), Respect for Individual Opinions in Peer Interactions ($M = 3.50$), and Encouragement for Active Participation in Learning ($M = 3.50$). Students also recognized the role of peer support in learning ($M = 3.49$) and indicated that peers encouraged them in learning when there were difficulties ($M = 3.47$). The mean scores were somewhat lower for Seeking Academic Support from Peers ($M = 3.46$), Cooperative Preparation for Examinations ($M = 3.42$), Peer Guidance for Managing

University Life ($M = 3.42$), and Supportive Academic Discussions with Peers ($M = 3.36$). These scores, however, still indicate positive perceptions of peer support in general. The results indicate that peer support is a significant driver in improving students' learning experiences in the public sector universities, facilitating collaboration, support, sharing of resources, and emotional encouragement.

Table 3

Relationship Between Peer Support and Academic Performance

	Mean	SD	r	P
Peer Support	3.55	0.604	-0.101	0.111
Academic Performance	2.86	0.505		

$P > 0.05$

Table 3 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between peer support and academic performance among students. The results show that the mean score for peer support was 3.55 ($SD = 0.604$), while the mean score for academic performance was 2.86 ($SD = 0.505$). The analysis revealed a negative but statistically non-significant relationship between peer support and academic performance ($r = -0.101$, $p = 0.111$), indicating that peer support was not significantly associated with students' academic performance in the present study. Overall, the findings suggest that peer support did not play a significant role in influencing students' academic performance.

Table 4

Differences In Peer Support Based on Gender

Gender	Mean	SD	t.value	Df	Sig.value
Male	3.62	0.592	1.91	248	0.057
Female	3.48	0.609			

$P > 0.05$

Table 4 shows that male students ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.592$) had higher peer support than female students ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.609$). An independent samples t-test difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.91$, $df = 248$, $p = 0.057$), as the p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant gender difference in peer support among students in public sector universities.

Table 5

Difference In Academic Performance Based on Gender

Gender	Mean	SD	t.value	Df	Sig.value
Male	2.87	0.556	0.512	248	0.609
Female	2.84	0.450			

$P > 0.05$

Table 5 shows that male students ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.556$) had a slightly higher academic performance than female students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.450$). However, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 0.512$, $df = 248$, $p = .609 > 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in academic performance between male and female students in public sector universities.

Peer support and academic achievement among students in public sector universities did not significantly correlate, according to the study's findings. The correlation analysis revealed that the mean score of peer support was 3.55 ($SD = 0.604$), while the mean score of academic performance was 2.86 ($SD = 0.505$). The relationship between the two variables was found to be negative and statistically non-significant ($r = -0.101$, $p = 0.111$). This indicates that peer support was not significantly associated with students' academic performance in the present study.

The study also examined whether there was a significant difference in academic performance based on gender. The results showed that male students had a mean score of 2.87 ($SD = 0.556$), while female students had a mean score of 2.84 ($SD = 0.450$). The difference was found to be statistically non-significant ($t = 0.512$, $df = 248$, $p = 0.609$). This means that male and female students performed at a similar academic level. The findings showed no significant gender difference in peer support. Male students reported a mean score of 3.62 ($SD = 0.592$), whereas female students reported a mean score of 3.48 ($SD = 0.609$). However, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.91$, $df = 248$, $p = 0.057$). This suggests that both male and female students experienced peer support in a largely similar way.

Discussion, Limitations & Conclusion

In the present study, the focus was on peer support and students' performance in public sector universities. One of the main objectives of the study was to explore whether peer support was related to students' academic performance. The results revealed that there was no significant correlation between peer support and academic performance ($r = -0.101$, $p = 0.111$). This means that for the current study, peer support was not found to be significantly related to students' academic achievement. That is, despite students' self-reports of peer support, this peer support did not make meaningful contributions to students' academic success. A possible reason for this finding is that there are several factors that affect academic performance at the University level that are not related to peer support. The factors that influence a student's personal motivation, study habits, self-regulation, time management, teacher support, family background, and learning resource access may have a stronger influence on students' grades and academic outcomes. In such a case, peer support can be beneficial to students' social adjustment and emotional health, but it may not have the necessary impact on academic outcomes. Peer relationships may also not be directly academic, as may be the case in their relationships with each other, which may account for the absence of a significant association with performance in this study.

Another possible explanation is that the effectiveness of peer support might be related to the nature of peer interaction. Not all peer relationships necessarily promote academic improvement. Emotional support and companionship may be offered in some peer relationships but not necessarily in other relationships that may have a role to play in supporting students when it comes to learning, coursework, and exam preparation. Finally, peer interaction can be a hindrance to student learning in some instances if the relationships are not learning-supportive. Hence, the results indicate that peer support alone is not sufficient to positively impact academic performance, unless it is paired with positive academic habits and practices like collaborative learning, consistent study habits, and productive academic dialogue. The results of the present study are not in line with some prior studies that found a positive connection between peer support and academic success. Previous studies have indicated that supportive peer relationships can enhance motivation, confidence, engagement in the classroom, and academic persistence. The present results, however, indicate that such a relationship is not necessarily the same in all educational contexts. Public sector universities are usually plagued by a number of academic and structural issues like lack of resources, crowding in classrooms, financial pressures, and adjustment struggles. Under these conditions, school achievement

might be more strongly influenced by institutional and individual characteristics than by peer support. This could be why peer support was not statistically significant in the present study in relation to academic performance.

The study also analyzed whether there was a significant gender difference in the academic performance of males and females. The results showed no significant gender difference in academic performance between male students ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.556$) and female students ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.450$), $t(248) = 0.512$, $p = 0.609$. This means that males and females had a comparable academic performance in this study. The result indicates that both groups might have similar expectations in the academic world, have similar educational experiences, and have similar educational environments in the public sector universities, which can result in similar academic outcomes. Likewise, there was no gender difference in peer support. There was no significant difference between the mean of male ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.592$) and female ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.609$) students in terms of peer support, $t(248) = 1.91$, $p = 0.057$. This implies that peer support was experienced in a fairly similar manner by both male and female students. In other words, gender was not found to be a significant variable in this study regarding influencing students' perceptions of peer support.

The gender-related findings are significant because they indicate that the students are encountering the same academic environment and the same peer support in public sector universities and that both male and female students are experiencing this. The lack of significant differences between genders could be interpreted as suggesting that peer support and academic performance are more related to general academic climate, students' own work, and institutional factors than to gender. It also recommends that a peer-based support strategy implementation in the university might have a wider scope of utility for students other than for any particular gender group. The results of this research indicate that peer support was present among students, but was not statistically related to academic performance for the current sample. This indicates that a broader range of factors than simply peer relationships might be influencing academic performance in public sector universities. However, peer support might still prove to be helpful for students' emotional health, university adjustment, and belongingness. For this reason, universities may continue to focus on healthy peer interactions, co-operative learning, and positive relationships between students as well as focus on other academic and institutional factors that more directly influence students' academic success.

This study has several limitations. First, peer support was measured using a single self-developed scale with moderate reliability ($\alpha = 0.779$), and academic performance relied on self-reported CGPA rather than verified transcripts. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal conclusions about the direction of any relationship between peer support and academic performance. Third, data were collected from only two public sector universities in Faisalabad using a convenience sample, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions, disciplines, or private-sector institutions. Future studies would benefit from larger, randomly selected, multi-institutional samples and objective measures of academic performance.

The present study aimed to study peer support and students' academic performance in public sector universities. The primary objective was to gain a better understanding of the extent of peer support available to students, its relationship to academic success, and any potential gender differences in peer support and academic success. The findings showed that the level of peer support was moderate, suggesting that peer interaction and assistance are a normal aspect of university life. The statistical analysis showed, however, that peer support was negatively correlated with academic performance, but it was not significant. This implies that the findings did not show that peer support was a significant and direct influence on students' academic outcomes in this study.

The results suggest that, besides peer support influencing academic achievement, peer relationships can offer emotional support, learning opportunities, and academic collaboration, but not necessarily academic success and

measurable learning outcomes. Learners' personal motivation, personal study habits, time management, self-discipline, teaching quality, and availability of learning resources can have a greater impact on academic performance in public sector universities.

The study also revealed that there was no significant difference between the performance of male and female students. The two groups were about equal in performance, indicating that academic achievement is probably determined by similar educational factors and not by gender. Likewise, there was no gender difference in peer support. Male students reported higher levels of peer support compared to female students; however, this difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that peer interaction and support generally experienced in the university environment is not significantly different between the two groups. The results suggest that peer support is present among students, but it has not been found to have a significant effect on students' academic performance in this context. This can be attributed to the educational and institutional context experienced by students in public sector universities, where they are subjected to a variety of problems, including high class sizes, insufficient resources, educational stress, and adaptation problems. With this type of environment, academic performance will likely depend more on a wider range of academic and personal characteristics, besides peer interactions.

Although the relationship was not significant, peer support is still important to students' university lives. It promotes emotional health, alleviates isolation, and aids in students' adaptation to the academic and social requirements of university learning. Hence, universities should promote healthy relationships among students and an environment of team-based learning. Other psychological, academic, and institutional variables that are more predictive of academic achievement in a higher-education context could also be investigated in future studies.

From the results of the present study, it may be recommended that the academic atmosphere of public sector universities is supportive, in which students are encouraged to positively communicate with one another during discussion, group study, and cooperative study in the classroom. Peer support was not shown to be significantly related to academic outcomes in this study, but it could be beneficial in enhancing students' adaptation to the university experience, alleviating stress, and enhancing the sense of belonging. Peer mentoring or a buddy system can also be implemented within the university to familiarize students with the expectations of the academic environment and the practices of the university, especially for new students. Using cooperative learning methods where students can share ideas, discuss the content of the course, and assist each other in academic activities can also be encouraged by teachers. Meanwhile, universities should be mindful of other factors that may have a greater impact on academic performance, including study habits, motivation, teacher guidance, learning resources, and time management skills. Finally, future research should explore the potential for studying peer support in conjunction with other higher education academic, personal, and institutional factors to better understand the students' academic outcomes in higher education.

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