

Impacts of Time Management, Transportation, Home Environment and Family Responsibilities on Academic Performance and Focus of Day Scholar Students: A Case of the University of Malakand

Dr. Munir Khan¹, Saima Gul², Shamaila Khalil³, Umair Ahmad⁴, Dr. Shahid Iqbal⁵

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Education University of Malakand, Email drmunirkhan71@gmail.com

² BS Education, University of Malakand, Email: itshoorattaullah@gmail.com

³ Principal PES, PAF Base Peshawar, Affiliated with Cambridge System. Email: shamailaresearch@gmail.com

⁴ MPhil scholar at IER University of Peshawar, Email: umairkhattak604@gmail.com

⁵ CDPM/DAS/Institute of Education & Research, University of Peshawar Email: shahidiqbalkhan@uop.edu.pk , (Corresponding Author): siqbal@uop.edu.pk

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Abstract

Day scholars can have special challenges that can impact their school experience. On the basis of the challenges found in the first paper of this series, this qualitative study was conducted to investigate the effect of time management problems, transportation problems, home environment and family responsibilities on the academic performance and concentration of day scholar students at the University of Malakand, Pakistan. A total of 20 purposively selected day scholar students of BS Education programme were interviewed using Semi-structured written interview procedure. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data. The results showed that the academic performance was influenced by the lack of time management and the poor transportation quality, which led to missed classes, tiredness and quickness in doing homework assignments and insufficient examination preparation. Also, difficult home conditions such as noise, distractions, and strong family demands significantly affected children's abilities to concentrate, motivate, and maintain their attention on academic work. Those pressures, on a consistent basis, were reported as making those participants feel academically disadvantaged when compared to the students at hostel. The findings confirm Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, and illustrate the myriad challenges students encounter as a result of mismatches between the home, travel, and university environments. The study highlights the need for specific institutional support for day scholar students in higher education institutions with limited resources. This paper, in conjunction with its companion paper, provides a broad overview of the challenges and specific impacts, and has implications for working towards equity and better academic outcomes for commuting students.

Keywords: Day Scholar Students, Academic Performance, Academic Focus, Time Management, Transportation Barriers, Home Environment, Family Responsibilities, University of Malakand, Commuter Students

Introduction

There are many public universities in Pakistan where a significant number of students come and go from their homes everyday as day scholars. Although the general academic difficulties that these students experience have been identified in the first paper of this series, there is a lack of understanding of the impact of specific factors such as problem with time management, transportation difficulties, home environment and family responsibilities on their academic performance and cognitive focus. In this study, the second paper, the effects of these critical issues on day scholar students of the University of Malakand are explored.

Long commuting hours can lead to students' fragmented schedules and physical fatigue, which may negatively affect academic performance such as attendance, turn-in of assignments, preparation for exams, and actual exam performance (He, 2019; Shan, 2026). At the same time, in countries such as Pakistan, where the family and home environment is collectivist, students are often distracted and demotivated by competing demands, thus not being able to concentrate on their studies or learning process for long durations (Rasool et al., 2022). The problems are especially severe in the regional public universities like University of Malakand where students belong to different rural and semi-urban backgrounds and have their respective level of infrastructural and familial support.

These dynamics can be understood within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. The theory is based on the idea that the collaborative interaction among the microsystem (home and university), the mesosystem (crosstalk between home and university), and the exosystem (the transportation infrastructure and policies) contributes to students' academic development and success (Tong, 2024). Although the world has begun focusing on commuter students, context-specific studies of the effects of these issues on students' academic performance and concentration in higher education institutions in Pakistan are scarce. So far the studies have been descriptive and focused on comparing day scholars and hostelites without examining the mechanisms and consequences thereof (Ressler, 2025; Rasool et al., 2022).

To fill this gap, the present study examines the combined effect of time management problems, transportation problems, home environment and family responsibilities on the academics performance and interest of day scholar students of the University of Malakand. The results will provide important data to inform the creation of focused institutional policies and support for helping commuting students achieve equity and success in their academic pursuits.

Literature Review

Day scholar (commuter) students' academic performance and concentration are greatly affected by logistical, temporal and domestic issues. The current literature review aims to provide a synthesis of recent empirical and theoretical studies (mainly published after 2019) that examine the effects of time management, transportation, home environment, and family responsibilities on the academic performance of students with a specific focus on public universities in developing countries such as Pakistan.

Impact of Time Management and Transportation on Academic Performance

When a student commutes, time spent on the trip negatively affects academic performance, and time management is a problem. Commute time and time management challenges always have a negative impact on academic performance. The existing research shows that longer journey times are associated with greater levels of tiredness, absenteeism, lateness, and decrease in study time which ultimately results in lower grades and overall achieved outcome (Shan, 2026; Cheng et al., 2026). For example, Shan (2026) concluded that commuting time was negatively related to academic performance, through the intermediate variable of stress and limited time for academic

work. Likewise, studies have been conducted in urban areas and found that every extra minute of commuting leads to a drop in concentration and test scores (Guan et al., 2025). However, in developing environments such as Pakistan, these impacts can be exacerbated by substandard transportation services and roads, which frequently lead to lost classes and irregular study schedules (Rasool et al., 2022; Ressler, 2025). The combination of poor time management combined with daily travel increases these problems by reducing time for assignments and test preparation. The combination of poor time management combined with daily travel increases these problems by reducing time for assignments and test preparation.

Effects of Home Environment and Family Responsibilities on Academic Focus

The relationship between the home environment and family responsibilities to academic focus. This is an important factor in students' thinking about schoolwork that develops throughout the home environment. Studies reveal that commuter students have lower levels of concentration and cognitive engagement due to distractions like interruptions, lack of dedicated study space and noise (Khan et al., 2019; Gu, 2024). Collectivist cultures impose extra obligations on the family beyond those of education, such as other home duties, childcare for other family members and financial support, which all clash with studies and reduce motivation (Rasool et al., 2022). Researchers have shown that family environments can give emotional and nutritional support, but having competing household responsibilities can also cause distractions, increase stress, and decrease levels of engagement in schoolwork (Emblen-Perry et al., 2020). While these factors are important for both day scholars and hostel scholars, the latter have an atmosphere of academic orientation.

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory continues to be a useful model for the analysis of these effects. The microsystem (home and university), the mesosystem (interactions between the two), and the ecosystem (transportation systems and policies) all have an impact on student development and academic outcomes, as illustrated in the model (Tong, 2024; Renn, 2023). The university's systems are not aligned with those of the day scholar student, as commuting is a distraction from studying or family responsibilities interfere with participation in the university.

Gaps in the Literature

Although the research on commuter students has increased all around the world, studies specific to the influence of these factors in a Pakistani context, especially in institutions such as the University of Malakand which cater to the rural and semi-urban sections of Pakistani society, are still scarce. The majority of research is descriptive comparisons rather than detailed analysis on mechanisms that impact performance and focus (Ressler, 2025; Rasool et al., 2022). This study seeks to fill this gap, exploring these impacts in detail qualitatively.

Research Objectives

- To examine the impact of time management and transportation issues on the academic performance of day scholar students at the University of Malakand.
- To analyze the effect of home environment and family responsibilities on the academic focus of day scholar students at the University of Malakand.

Research Questions

- What are the impacts of time management and transportation issues on the academic performance of day scholar students?

- What are the effects of home environment and family responsibilities on the academic focus of day scholar students?
- How do these factors (time, transportation, home, and family) collectively influence students' overall academic engagement and outcomes?

Research Design

The present study used a qualitative research design to explore the effect of major academic management issues that occur in the lives of day scholar students. Logistical, temporal, and socio-familial factors can affect students' academic performance and attention, making qualitative inquiry appropriate. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The design was carried out using a descriptive interpretive approach, which was informed by the general challenges identified in the first paper of this series.

Nature of the Study

Descriptive & Explanatory Study. It used a qualitative method for analyzing the effect of time management, transportation problems, environmental problems of the houses, and family responsibilities on the academic achievement and concentration of day scholar students. This method can help to gain a more nuanced understanding of how these challenges impact students' lived academic experiences (Patton, 2015).

Population of the Study

Target population included all day scholar's students belonging to BS education undergraduate programme of the University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This department was selected purposively due to the diversity of the students' commuting from a rural, semi-urban and urban background and balancing the demands of daily commuting with academic demands. The University of Malakand is relevant in the context of the study because of its geographical location and high number of day scholars.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The number of 20-day scholar students were selected in BS Education Department using purposive sampling technique. For qualitative research, whenever the purpose is to choose information-rich cases that can yield detailed information relevant to the research purpose, then purposive sampling is recommended (Palinkas et al., 2015). The following inclusion criteria were used for selecting the participants: (a) full-time students enrolled in the BS Education programme, (b) non-hostelite (daily commuters) and (c) willingness to provide detailed experiences. A wide range of gender, year of study and commuting distance were sought, so as to enrich and diversify the data. Based on the guidelines for semi-structured interview studies in education research, 20 was felt to be a reasonable sample size for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide prepared by the researcher was used for data gathering. The guide included 12 to 15 open-ended questions related to the participants' perceptions of challenges in academic management, how they expressed in their daily academic life and the relative importance of these challenges. Three students (not part of the final sample size) were pilot tested on the instrument to ensure that it was clear, relevant, and flowed.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Two experienced faculty members of the Department of Education, University of Malakand and one peer researcher reviewed the interview guide to strengthen the content validity of the guide. Relevance to the research questions, wordings and alignment were included in the feedback. Trustworthiness was achieved through the application of well-known qualitative criteria: (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017):

Fellow Checking, in which participant feedback was solicited on summaries of their key responses, was the means by which credibility was assured.

Dependability: By methodologically detailed documentation of decisions.

Confirmability: Reflexive journaling to reduce researcher bias.

Transferability: By giving thick description of the research situation, inviting assessment of applicability to other contexts.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were approached via the relevant university authorities following official permission. All participants gave written informed consent. Written semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. This format was selected for several reasons, including the commuting needs of the participants and giving them enough time to think and reflect on their answers. The data was collected for four weeks in 2025 with follow up questions when clarification was needed. Immediately upon receipt all responses were anonymised.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis. Specific issues of effects of time management, transportation, home environment and family responsibilities on academic performance were discussed in great detail. Inductive and deductive coding were used, depending on the purpose of this study.

Participant Overview

Twenty-day scholar students (pseudonyms P1-P20) from the BS Education programme participated in the study. The student sample consisted of students from varying academic years and distances to be commuted, so as to include a wide range of perspectives on the difficulties of having to manage academic life from a distance.

Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Impact of Time Management and Transportation Issues on Academic Performance Time management difficulties combined with daily commuting significantly affected attendance, assignment completion, and exam preparation. Fatigue from travel reduced study effectiveness and led to missed classes.

"I come home and I'm tired. I don't feel like opening my books." (P1) Many participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P12, etc.) reported frequent missed classes and rushed assignment work due to logistical constraints.

Theme 2: Effects of Home Environment on Academic Focus The home environment played a dual role. Distractions such as noise, guests, and lack of dedicated study space severely limited concentration and cognitive engagement.

"The children in our house are very naughty and they tease us all day due to which we cannot focus on study." (P4)

Theme 3: Influence of Family Responsibilities on Academic Engagement Household chores and caregiving duties regularly competed with study time, leading to reduced motivation, incomplete assignments, and heightened stress.

"I help my mother every day. Then it becomes difficult for me to study." (P1) This burden was especially evident in participants who struggled with deadlines and exam preparation.

Theme 4: Overall Perceived Disadvantage and Its Consequences Participants consistently felt academically disadvantaged compared to hostel students, which affected their overall engagement and motivation. *"Hostel students get more time to study... I always study alone."* (P5)

Theme 5: Student Suggestions for Mitigation Participants recommended flexible schedules, improved transport services, online resources, and time management support to reduce the negative impacts on performance and focus.

Summary of Findings

Results show that time management and transportation problems hinder academic achievement due to poor attendance, lack of preparation time and fatigue. Likewise, the difficulty in the home and demands of family responsibilities have a profound effect on academic focus, concentration and motivation of the Day Scholar students. These factors serve as cumulative disadvantages for students in the hostel and thus emphasize the need of specific institutional interventions.

Discussion

This research analyzed the effect of the challenges of time management, transportation, home environment and family responsibilities on student's academic performance and concentration at the University of Malakand day scholar students. The results show that these factors are important and interrelated, and that they have a detrimental impact on pupils' attendance, completion of homework, preparation for exams, focus and engagement with learning. Time management issues and transportation limitations had a definite impact on students' academic achievement. The long commute to school often caused participants to become fatigued, leading to a lack of show up for school, no completed assignments, and poor exam preparation. The findings support recent empirical studies that suggest that longer commuting distance is correlated with poor academic outcomes, which may stem from less study time and higher stress levels (Shan, 2026; Guan et al., 2025). In Pakistan's regional universities, the problem of unreliable transport further exacerbates these impacts, resulting in disjointed learning experiences. The school environment and responsibilities at home were identified as significant barriers to students' concentration in school. Interruptions in study sessions and the loss of motivation were common due to noise, household distractions, and caring responsibilities. This helps explain findings that domestic responsibilities in collectivist societies tend to interfere with academic tasks, resulting in divided attention and reduced cognitive engagement (Rasool et al., 2022; Gu, 2024). For many participants, however, the responsibilities at home came at the end of the day, leaving them mentally drained, whereas this was not the case for the hostel students. The results of this study confirm the view of disadvantage as day scholars exist in two environments that they must negotiate with each other. This feeling of inequity can also contribute to a loss of motivation and academic self-efficacy. Theoretically, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory is a good way to understand the impacts observed. Transitions from home to university microsystems each day, and the influence of exosystems factors like transport systems integrate stressors that threaten performance and attention (Tong, 2024). The mismatch for day scholars seems to be greater than for those who live on campus, which is more similar to the context of educational expectations. The present study

continues a series of studies that identified the wide ranges of challenges found in the first paper and then illustrates how these challenges impact academic outcomes. For some students, these issues can be addressed with individual coping strategies, but the results indicate a need for systemic support if equity in academic outcomes is to be realized. Recommendations for Practice: The University of Malakand and other institutions should introduce specific measures such as secure shuttle facilities, flexible classes timings for day scholars, provide online learning materials, set-up family understanding programs, and create study areas for day scholars. This study identifies the negative impacts which can be mitigated by such measures. Limitations: This study is based on self-reported written interviews and is limited to one department in one university. Mixed methods designs and expanded, multi-institutional samples would be useful for future research. To conclude, the problems of time management, transportation, unsupported family environment and family burden have a significant negative effect on the academic performance and concentration of day scholar students. It is very important to address these factors to achieve equity and better education outcomes in public higher education institutions in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to study the effect of Time management problems, Transportation problems, Home environment and Family responsibilities on Academic performance and Concentration of Day scholar students of University of Malakand. The results are clear and show that these factors are significant and interrelated factors that have a negative impact on students' attendance, assignment completion, exam preparation, concentration, motivation and overall academic engagement. Amongst all the above, the issue of time management and untrustworthy transportation results in students missing classes frequently, becoming physically and mentally exhausted, having less time to study, and consequently, having lower academic standards. At the same time, poor family support and overloaded family schedules have a major negative effect on students' ability to focus and have a consistent focus in school. Overall, these challenges contribute to the feeling that students in hostels are disadvantaged and accentuate the inequalities in access to and achievement in higher education. The findings supported and enriched existing literature with context-specific evidence from public university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The theory of bioecological systems of the Bronfenbrenner seems to be an effective theory in explaining why day scholar students experience cumulative disadvantages when there are misalignments between the home and university environments and the travel environment. This study, along with the previous paper of this series, demonstrates that for day scholars, academic struggles are not only individual, but structural, logistical and socio-familial. Institutional action is needed urgently and specially toward these issues. Practical measures like offering better transportation facilities, flexible study hours, and separate study spaces for commuters and suitable arrangements for family responsibilities alongside studies should be encouraged in higher education institutes, including the University of Malakand. This is critical to foster equity and improve academic achievement in the many students who are day scholars. This study is qualitative in nature and there is a limitation in the sample of the study which is one department in one university. The results need to be further validated and generalised in future studies with larger and multi-institutional study designs and with mixed methods. Finally, effective support of day scholar student is essential for making the higher education system more inclusive and equitable in Pakistan. This two-paper series helps to better understand the challenges and impacts, and provides a basis for evidence-informed policy and practice.

Practical Recommendations

According to the results of this research the following recommendations are forwarded for minimizing the negative effects of the major challenges on the academic performance and concentration of day scholar students at the University of Malakand:

1. Enhance Transportation Infrastructure: Dedicated shuttle bus with schedule to be designed according to the class schedule. This would help to save travelling time, academic absenteeism and fatigue, enhancing academic performance.
2. Improve Academic Flexibility and Support: Departments to provide flexible class hours, video lectures, online learning materials, library hours for day scholars. Having specific quiet areas on campus will help students to manage their time and focus on their academics.
3. Organize Targeted Student and Family Support Programmes: The university should arrange activities to help manage time, stress and family responsibilities regularly. Plus, awareness sessions with families of day scholars should be held to promote an encouraging home environment supporting the focus on school work.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research suggests a number of interesting areas for future research:

1. Quantitative and Multi-Institutional Studies: Large Scale quantitative study should be done in multiple departments & universities of Pakistan to assess the magnitude and statistical significance of these problems on GPA, attendance and retention of students.
2. Mixed-Methods and Longitudinal Research: There is a need for future studies to include mixed-methods designs and longitudinal approaches to observe the changes in impacts of time management, transportation, home environment and family responsibilities over time as students' progress through their educational experiences.
3. Intervention and Evaluation Studies: To assess the effectiveness of specific interventions (shuttle services, time management training, home/ university linkage programmes, etc.) on academic performance and focus of day scholar students, experimental or action research is required.

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