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Psychological Capital as a Predictor of Students' Motivation and Academic Performance at University Level

Ayesha Aqeedat
MPhil, Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad

Rizwana Bibi
MPhil,Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad

Dr. Shamaiela Farooqi (Corresponding Author)
Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Government College University. Faisalabad
shamaiela_farooqi@yahoo.com

Nouman Mukhtar
MPhil, Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad

Shahida Usman
MPhil, Department of Education, Government College University, Faisalabad

ABSTRACT

Psychological Capital is a developable positive psychological resource comprising hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. This study examined its relationship with students' motivation and academic performance at university level. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 300 students in selected public and private universities in Faisalabad. IBM SPSS Version 22 was used for descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. Students reported high Psychological Capital ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.64$), motivation ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.61$), and academic performance ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.64$). Psychological Capital correlated strongly with motivation ($r = .857$, $p < .01$) and academic performance ($r = .793$, $p < .01$). It significantly predicted motivation ($R^2 = .734$, $F = 821.596$, $p < .001$) and academic performance ($R^2 = .629$, $F = 505.500$, $p < .001$). The findings indicate that students with stronger positive psychological resources tend to remain more motivated and report stronger academic functioning.

Keywords: *Psychological Capital, Hope, Self-Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism, Students' Motivation, Academic Performance*

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INTRODUCTION

The transition to university education represents a major developmental and academic shift. Students are required to take greater responsibility for planning their studies, meeting deadlines, participating in collaborative work, and making decisions about future careers. These expectations can be productive, but they can also expose students to repeated experiences of uncertainty, competition, disappointment, and academic stress. Under such conditions, students who possess positive psychological resources may be better positioned to sustain effort and adapt to changing demands.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) offers a useful perspective because it focuses on resources that can be strengthened rather than on fixed personal characteristics. Luthans and colleagues conceptualized PsyCap as a higher-order construct consisting of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism, commonly summarized as HERO. Although each component has a distinct meaning, the four resources can operate together. A student may, for example, believe that an academic goal is achievable, identify more than one route toward that goal, recover after an unsatisfactory result, and continue to expect that persistent and realistic effort can lead to improvement (Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

The educational relevance of PsyCap becomes particularly clear when motivation and academic performance are considered together. Motivation influences whether students begin academic tasks, how much energy they invest, and how long they continue when work becomes difficult. Academic performance, meanwhile, reflects the cumulative effect of knowledge, preparation, study habits, self-regulation, feedback use, and persistence. Psychological resources may therefore contribute to performance both directly and indirectly by shaping the behaviors through which students engage with learning.

In the Pakistani university context, students study within diverse institutional, social, and economic circumstances. Exploring positive psychological resources in a local setting can help universities identify student-development practices that complement academic instruction. The present study focuses on students from selected public and private universities in Faisalabad and examines whether Psychological Capital is associated with, and statistically predicts, Students' Motivation and Academic Performance. The focus is not to claim that psychological resources replace academic ability or institutional support, but to investigate whether they represent an important personal resource within university learning.

University students are expected to manage independent learning, assessment pressure, research tasks, presentations, changing social demands, financial concerns, and uncertainty about future employment. Academic success therefore depends not only on prior knowledge but also on psychological resources that support sustained effort, adaptive coping, and constructive responses to setbacks. Psychological Capital provides a strengths-based framework for examining these resources through hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017).

Within the HERO framework, hope supports goal-directed energy and alternative pathways; self-efficacy reflects confidence in handling challenging tasks; resilience supports recovery after difficulty; and optimism sustains realistic positive expectations. These capacities can influence how students interpret academic demands, use feedback, seek help, and persist. Because Psychological Capital is considered relatively state-like and developable, it also has practical relevance for mentoring, counselling, goal setting,

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feedback, and student-support programs.

OBJECTIVES

The article examines the overall levels of Psychological Capital, Students' Motivation, and Academic Performance; explores relationships among the three variables; and determines whether Psychological Capital significantly predicts motivation and academic performance among university students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Capital and the HERO Resources. Hope, in Snyder's (2002) theory, includes both agency, or the motivational energy to pursue goals, and pathways, or the perceived ability to generate routes toward those goals. In academic life, this distinction is important because students frequently encounter blocked pathways. A hopeful student may respond to a difficult course, an unsuccessful assessment, or a scheduling problem by identifying alternative study strategies rather than abandoning the goal. Hope can therefore support persistence by keeping both the desired outcome and possible routes to that outcome psychologically available.

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute actions required for a particular task (Bandura, 1997). Academic self-efficacy can influence the level of challenge students are willing to accept, the effort they invest, and their response to mistakes. Students who believe they can learn a difficult concept are more likely to attempt demanding tasks and to interpret corrective feedback as information for improvement. This does not imply unrealistic confidence; rather, efficacy is most useful when it supports purposeful effort, strategy selection, and continued learning.

Resilience concerns the capacity to recover, adapt, and continue functioning after adversity or disruption. University students may experience low grades, heavy workloads, financial pressures, interpersonal problems, or uncertainty about future employment. Resilience can help students return to productive routines after such difficulties. Research on academic stress also emphasizes that sustained stress can affect well-being and educational functioning, making adaptive coping resources especially relevant in higher education (Pascoe et al., 2020; Kaur & Amin, 2018).

Optimism involves generally positive but realistic expectations about future outcomes and the interpretation of setbacks. In education, optimism may help students view a poor result as temporary and improvable rather than as evidence that future effort is pointless. When optimism is combined with efficacy and hope, positive expectations can be translated into concrete action. The value of optimism is therefore not simple positive thinking; it lies in maintaining constructive expectations while continuing to respond to evidence, feedback, and academic requirements.

Psychological Capital and Students' Motivation. Motivation determines the direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior. Self-determination theory highlights the importance of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in supporting high-quality motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020). PsyCap can complement these motivational conditions by providing personal resources that influence how students perceive challenges and their own ability to respond. Hope may clarify goals and pathways, efficacy may increase willingness to act, resilience may reduce disengagement after setbacks, and optimism may preserve expectations of progress. Together, these

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resources can support sustained academic involvement.

Psychological Capital and Academic Performance. Academic performance is influenced by a broad network of cognitive, behavioral, motivational, and contextual factors. A systematic review by Richardson et al. (2012) demonstrated the importance of psychological correlates in university achievement, while research on self-regulation emphasizes planning, monitoring, strategic action, and motivation (Zimmerman, 2008). PsyCap may contribute to these processes by encouraging students to prepare consistently, persist with difficult tasks, seek assistance, and use feedback constructively. Longitudinal evidence has also linked satisfaction of basic psychological needs, increased psychological capital, and better academic performance, suggesting that positive resources may participate in developmental pathways over time (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019).

The role of feedback provides another connection between PsyCap and performance. Effective feedback helps learners understand current performance, desired goals, and possible next steps (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Students with stronger positive psychological resources may be more prepared to receive such feedback without interpreting it as a final judgment of ability. Efficacy can support confidence to attempt revisions, hope can support alternative strategies, resilience can facilitate recovery from disappointment, and optimism can sustain expectations that improvement remains possible.

Taken together, the literature provides a theoretical basis for expecting positive relationships among Psychological Capital, Students' Motivation, and Academic Performance. However, the strength of these relationships can vary by population and context. Examining these variables among university students in Faisalabad therefore contributes context-specific evidence and provides a basis for considering whether strengths-based student support may have practical relevance in local higher education settings.

Positive psychology shifted attention from deficits toward resources that help individuals function effectively under pressure. In educational settings, self-efficacy, motivation, effort regulation, coping, and engagement are repeatedly linked with academic outcomes. Psychological Capital integrates several of these adaptive resources into one higher-order construct. Research suggests that confident and hopeful students are more willing to attempt difficult work, resilient students are better able to return to tasks after setbacks, and optimistic students are more likely to maintain effort when improvement is not immediate.

Motivation represents the direction, intensity, and persistence of learning behavior. Self-determination perspectives emphasize competence, autonomy, and relatedness, while Psychological Capital contributes personal resources that can help students initiate and sustain motivated action. Academic performance likewise reflects more than cognitive ability: preparation, persistence, feedback use, study behavior, and coping responses contribute to learning outcomes. The present study therefore considers motivation and performance together as related educational outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. The descriptive-correlational design was appropriate because the study aimed to describe the observed levels of the three variables and examine statistical relationships among them without experimentally manipulating students' psychological

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characteristics or educational conditions. Correlation analysis was used to estimate the direction and strength of association, whereas simple linear regression was used to determine the extent to which Psychological Capital statistically predicted each outcome variable.

Participants and Setting. The dataset comprised 300 students enrolled in selected public and private universities in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Including students from both types of institutions provided a university-level sample within the selected geographical setting. The present article retains the sample and variables reported in the thesis dataset and does not introduce additional demographic or institutional claims beyond the available data.

Measurement. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information on Psychological Capital, Students' Motivation, and Academic Performance. Psychological Capital was represented through the four HERO resources: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. The overall constructs were treated quantitatively on the study's five-point response scale. The reported means therefore provide an indication of the general level of each construct within the sample, while the correlation and regression analyses address relationships between the overall variable scores.

Data Analysis. IBM SPSS Version 22 was used for statistical analysis. Means and standard deviations summarized the central tendency and dispersion of the variables. Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to examine bivariate associations among Psychological Capital, Students' Motivation, and Academic Performance. Simple linear regression was then conducted separately for motivation and academic performance, with Psychological Capital entered as the predictor. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was interpreted as the proportion of variance in the outcome statistically accounted for by the predictor in each model.

A quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The study drew on data from 300 university students enrolled in selected public and private universities in Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. A structured questionnaire measured Psychological Capital, Students' Motivation, and Academic Performance. Psychological Capital was conceptualized through the HERO resources of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Data were analyzed in IBM SPSS Version 22 using descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation. Simple linear regression was used to test the predictive effect of Psychological Capital on Students' Motivation and Academic Performance. The significance level used in the thesis analyses was $p < .05$, with the reported key relationships significant at $p < .01$ or $p < .001$.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation was voluntary and the questionnaire stated that responses would be used for academic and research purposes and kept confidential. The analysis reported here is a focused article derived from the thesis dataset and retains the thesis variables, sample, and statistical results.

RESULTS

Variable	Mean	SD
Psychological Capital	3.94	0.64
Students' Motivation	4.05	0.61

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Academic Performance	3.97	0.64

All three overall means were above the midpoint of the five-point scale. Students' Motivation had the highest mean, followed by Academic Performance and Psychological Capital.

Relationship	r	Significance
Psychological Capital - Motivation	.857	$p < .01$
Psychological Capital - Academic Performance	.793	$p < .01$
Motivation - Academic Performance	.786	$p < .01$

The correlation matrix showed strong positive relationships among all three variables. Students with higher Psychological Capital tended to report stronger motivation and academic performance, while motivation was also strongly associated with performance.

Outcome	β	R^2	F	p
Students' Motivation	.857	.734	821.596	< .001
Academic Performance	.793	.629	505.500	< .001

Psychological Capital explained 73.4% of the variance in Students' Motivation and 62.9% of the variance in Academic Performance in the reported simple regression models.

DISCUSSION

The descriptive findings show that the students reported comparatively high levels of all three constructs, with mean scores above the midpoint of the five-point scale. Motivation had the highest mean ($M = 4.05$), followed by Academic Performance ($M = 3.97$) and Psychological Capital ($M = 3.94$). These results suggest that the sampled students generally perceived themselves as motivated and academically functioning while also reporting substantial positive psychological resources. The similarity of the mean levels is consistent with the conceptual expectation that these constructs can develop alongside one another in educational settings.

The strongest observed relationship was between Psychological Capital and Students' Motivation ($r = .857$, $p < .01$). This result is theoretically meaningful because each HERO component can support a different aspect of motivated behavior. Hope contributes goals and pathways, efficacy supports confidence in taking action, resilience assists students in returning to tasks after setbacks, and optimism helps preserve constructive expectations. The regression model further showed that Psychological Capital accounted for 73.4% of the variance in motivation ($R^2 = .734$). Within this sample, PsyCap was therefore a substantial statistical predictor of motivated academic functioning.

Psychological Capital also had a strong positive relationship with Academic Performance ($r = .793$, $p < .01$), and the regression model accounted for 62.9% of the variance in performance ($R^2 = .629$). One plausible interpretation is behavioral: students with

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stronger psychological resources may be more likely to persist, prepare, seek assistance, regulate effort, and use feedback. This interpretation is compatible with research emphasizing self-regulation and psychological correlates of academic achievement (Zimmerman, 2008; Richardson et al., 2012). However, the present design does not directly test the behavioral mechanisms through which the relationship occurs.

The positive association between Students' Motivation and Academic Performance ($r = .786$, $p < .01$) further supports the view that motivation and performance are interconnected outcomes rather than isolated features of student experience. Motivated students are more likely to devote time and attention to learning tasks, but performance can also influence later motivation through experiences of success, failure, feedback, and perceived competence. Because the data are cross-sectional, the direction of these reciprocal processes cannot be determined from the present analyses.

Practical Implications. The findings support consideration of strengths-based approaches within university student services. Mentoring and academic advising can incorporate clear goal setting and pathway planning to strengthen hope. Constructive feedback and appropriately challenging learning experiences can support efficacy. Counselling, peer support, and reflection on coping strategies may strengthen resilience, while realistic discussion of progress and future possibilities can encourage adaptive optimism. These practices should complement, rather than replace, high-quality teaching, academic resources, financial support, and responsive institutional systems.

Limitations. Several limitations should guide interpretation. First, the cross-sectional correlational design does not establish cause and effect or the temporal ordering of variables. Second, the study is limited to 300 students from selected public and private universities in Faisalabad, so generalization to other cities, provinces, or national contexts should be made cautiously. Third, the variables were assessed through a structured questionnaire, meaning that the findings reflect the study's measured self-reported constructs. Finally, simple regression models examine one predictor at a time and do not account for other academic, demographic, institutional, or socioeconomic factors that may also influence motivation and performance.

The findings support the thesis proposition that positive psychological resources are closely connected with how students engage with university learning. The particularly strong association with motivation is consistent with the idea that confidence, goal pathways, recovery from setbacks, and positive expectations help sustain academic effort. The strong relationship with academic performance is also consistent with a behavioral pathway in which psychologically resourceful students are more likely to prepare, persist, seek assistance, and respond constructively to feedback.

The cross-sectional design does not establish temporal causation. The regression findings should therefore be interpreted as predictive statistical relationships within the sampled students rather than proof that increasing Psychological Capital alone will necessarily cause a particular change in grades or performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the study provides evidence that Psychological Capital is closely associated with two important educational outcomes among the sampled university students. The strong relationships do not imply that PsyCap is the sole determinant of success; rather, they indicate that hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism form a meaningful set of personal resources that can accompany motivated engagement and stronger academic functioning.

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The results are particularly relevant because PsyCap is conceptualized as relatively state-like and developable, creating possibilities for educational support and intervention.

Universities may consider integrating PsyCap-oriented activities into existing student-development structures rather than treating them as separate programs. Goal-setting workshops can encourage students to define meaningful academic targets and alternative pathways. Academic advising and mentoring can provide mastery-focused feedback that builds efficacy. Orientation, counselling, and peer-support activities can include coping and recovery strategies that promote resilience. Career guidance can combine realistic planning with constructive expectations about future opportunities, thereby supporting adaptive optimism.

Future studies should examine these relationships through longitudinal designs to determine how Psychological Capital, motivation, and performance change across semesters. Intervention studies could test whether structured PsyCap development produces measurable changes in student outcomes. Qualitative research could explore how students describe hope, confidence, recovery from setbacks, and optimism in their own academic experiences. Mixed-method studies may be particularly useful for connecting statistical patterns with the lived realities of students. Sampling should also be extended beyond Faisalabad and should consider a wider range of institutions and student groups.

Further research may also examine more complex models in which motivation, engagement, self-regulation, feedback use, academic stress, or institutional support operate as mediators or moderators. Such work would help clarify not only whether Psychological Capital is related to academic outcomes, but also how, when, and under what conditions its components are most educationally relevant.

Psychological Capital was positively and significantly related to both Students' Motivation and Academic Performance and was a substantial predictor of each outcome in the thesis dataset. Universities can consider strengths-based student development through mentoring, goal-setting exercises, constructive feedback, resilience-building activities, counselling, and academic advising. Future research should use longitudinal, intervention, qualitative, or mixed-method designs and extend sampling beyond Faisalabad to test how these relationships develop over time and across contexts.

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