

COURSE EXPERIENCES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Keywords: Course experiences, student perceptions, higher education, student evaluation, Academic Achievement.

Assessment of academic achievement in higher education is a critical issue to be researched as higher education prepares an individual to venture out in the world of profession and enables to participate in the process of social progression. Talking of universities as institutions of higher learning where students come with certain aspirations and their perceptions about course experiences serve as their performance indicator. This study seeks to study the perceptions of university students about their course-experiences and how their academic achievement varies accordingly. A sample of 180 students pursuing post-graduation from Panjab University, Chandigarh was taken using purposive and stratified sampling. Course experience perceptions and academic achievement were studied using descriptive statistics and t-ratio was calculated to ascertain the significance of difference between the mean scores of academic achievement and course experiences of university students. The results revealed significant gender difference in the course experiences and academic achievement among post graduate students. Also the students pursuing different streams of study varied in their course experiences.

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Introduction:

One of the ailments in Indian education system is of mediocrity, be it academic achievement or be it research carried out in higher education. The challenge remains in raising the standards of performance of higher learning institutions that in turn is reflected by the students' achievement. The major issue of concern remains the perceptions of students related to teaching, assessment, course content and structure within natural settings of institutions of higher learning as these factors influence how they learn and what they learn. Arguably, the provision of postgraduate education in many developed and developing countries has been in response to increasing demands of students (both traditional and non-traditional students who either follow courses on a full-time or part-time basis) who realize the value of postgraduate education in enhancing their career prospects. (Kaur, 2009)

Research carried out in higher education supports influence of learning environment in academic achievement and the term course experience connotes dimensions of students' experiences of learning. The construct of course experiences is primarily based on the assumption that a significant part of university experiences and learning outcomes are affected by what happens outside the classroom. Salient areas of course experience include: effective teaching; aims and objectives of the institution; assessment procedures; appropriate workload; learning climate and intellectual environment; social dimensions of learning; provision and utilisation of resources to encourage and support independent learning; guidance and support for students to encourage increasing academic independence; analysis of higher-order graduate outcomes beyond generic skills; enhancement of graduates' intellectual stimulus and challenge; recognition of the growing importance of information technology etc. Combination of both academic and interpersonal factors in students' course experiences promote the sense of belonging and, ultimately, their academic motivation.

The construct of course experiences is primarily based on the assumption that a significant part of university experiences and learning outcomes are affected by what happens outside the classroom (Griffin, Coates, McInnis and James, 2003). A large body of research indicates that students' out-of-class experiences may have as much influence on the development of higher-order cognitive skills as do their more formal, classroom-based instructional experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 1998).

Ning and Downing (2010) explored the relationship between learning experience and study behaviour, and examined their relative impact on university students' academic performance. Both constructs were significantly predictive of current academic performance of undergraduates. Results from this study outlined linkages between learning experience and study behaviour in influencing academic achievement.

Research Context:

The teaching-learning process in higher education focuses more on critical thinking; transmission of knowledge towards applicability and skill development so as the learners become productive contributors to social and economic development. Moreover, previous academic performance in the qualifying examinations plays a crucial role in selecting a particular course of study, may be academic or professional and further, varying courses demand different learning strategies from learners and motivational beliefs also, differ from learner to learner. The research endeavours in higher education are focussed on learning outcomes in the form of achievement of students which serve as quality indicators of education institutions in the process of educational attainment. Research has shown that students recognize the usefulness of evaluation in improving the quality of universities and the relationship between students and academic staff (Leite et al. 2006). Thus, perceptions of students regarding the course that they are enrolled in should influence their academic achievement and this is what the present study seeks to explore.

Statement of the problem:

COURSE EXPERIENCES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Objectives of the study:

- To study course experiences among the post-graduate students.
- To study the academic achievement among the post-graduate students.
- To study the academic achievement of students in relation to their course experience perceptions.

Hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the course experiences among postgraduate students in relation to their gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of the postgraduate students in relation to their gender.

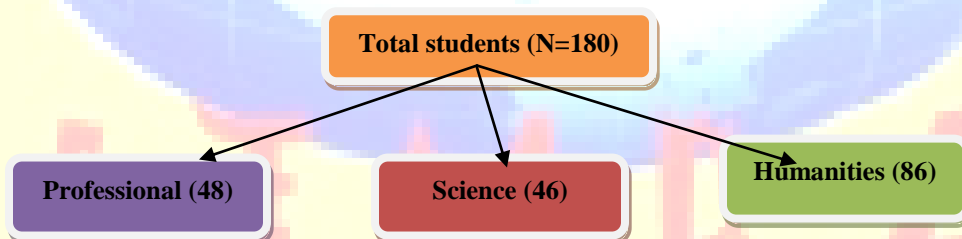
3. There is no significant difference in the course experiences of students pursuing professional, science and humanities course.
4. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students pursuing professional, science and humanities course.
5. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of postgraduate students in relation to their course experiences.

Delimitations of the Study:

- The study is delimited to the students pursuing postgraduate courses only.
- Students pursuing post-graduation from Panjab University, Chandigarh have been considered for the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique used:

The sample of 180 postgraduate students pursuing courses in professional (M.Ed.), science (M.Sc. mathematics) and humanities (M.A. Hindi) was selected from Panjab University, Chandigarh. The sample was selected by employing purposive and stratified sampling technique. The sample consisted of 120 female students whereas male students were only 60 in number. Also, in terms of type of courses pursued, the sample distribution is given below:



Tools Used:

- The course experiences of postgraduate students were studied using the adapted version (prepared by the researcher) of Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) originally developed by Ramsden (1991). The questionnaire consists of 52 items in the form of statements. The tool was planned keeping in view that the items to be included should reflect the appropriate proportion of emphasis across the five dimensions namely: good teaching, student support, clear goals, appropriate workload and assessment, & generic skills. The items of the scale are framed across a five point Likert's scale. Range of scores on this questionnaire is 52-260.
- Academic achievement of the students was measured using marks obtained in their previous qualifying exam.

Statistical techniques used:

- Descriptive statistics were used to study the course experiences and academic achievement of post-graduate students.
- Inferential statistics were used to analyze the difference in the mean scores of course experience perceptions and academic achievement of postgraduate students.

Results and Discussion:

Table1: Showing frequency distribution of the raw scores of postgraduate students on course experiences:

Class Interval	Frequency
161-180	8
181-200	6
201-220	18
221-240	41
241-260	37
261-280	34
281-300	32
301-320	4

Graph 1 Showing distribution curve of the scores on Course Experiences of postgraduate students

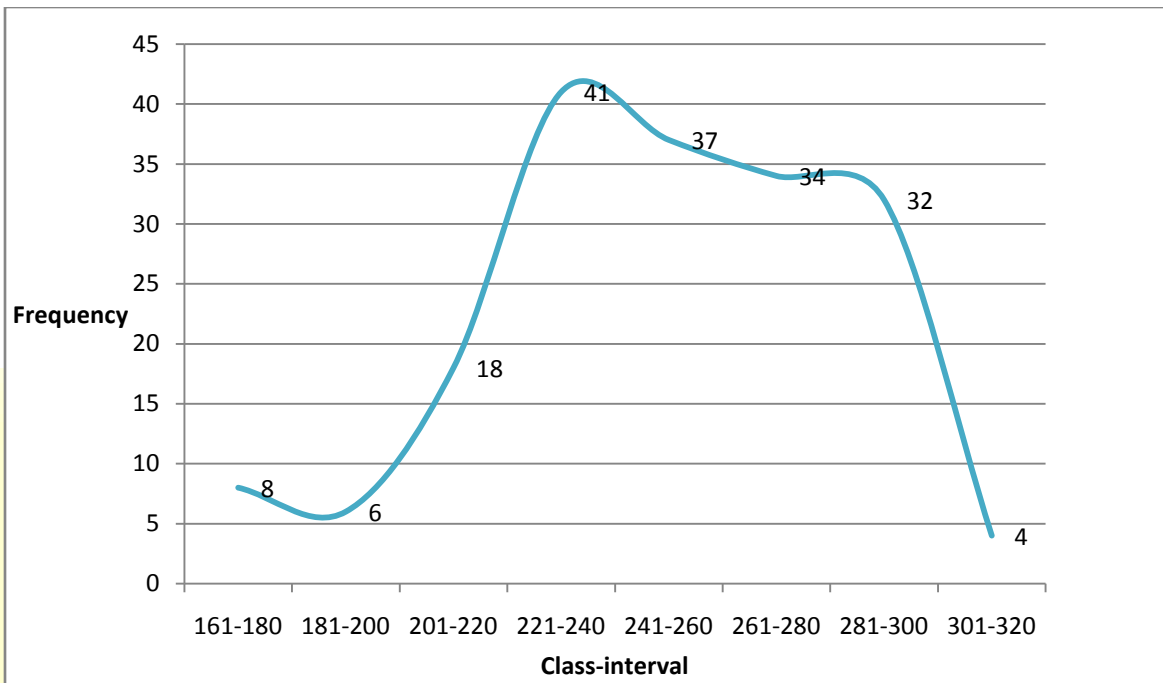


Table2: Showing frequency distribution of academic achievement scores of postgraduate students

Class Interval	Frequency
51-55	6
56-60	18
61-65	30
66-70	30
71-75	38
76-80	38
81-85	11
86-90	5
91-95	4

Graph 2 Showing distribution curve of the academic achievement scores of postgraduate students

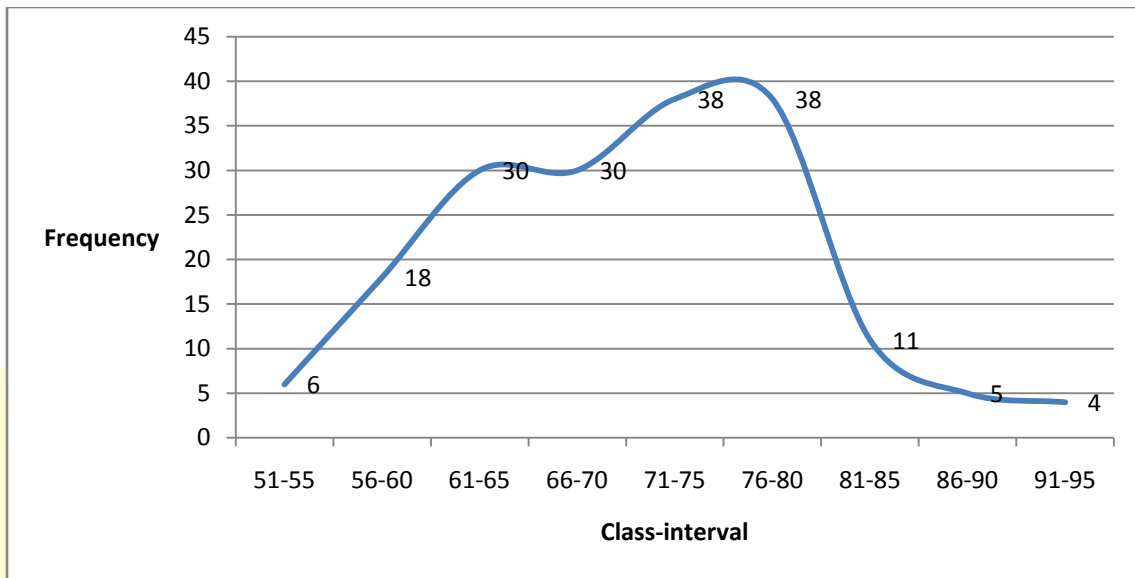


Table3: Showing descriptive statistics of scores on course experiences and academic achievement of post-graduate students

Variable(s)	Course experiences	Academic achievement
Mean	247.48	71.29
Standard deviation	33.33	8.47

From table 3 it is clear that the mean score on the course experiences of the postgraduate students is 247.48 which is much higher than the average score of 156. Thus it can be inferred that the postgraduate students have a positive course experience perceptions. This is indicative of student satisfaction related to good teaching, student support, clear goals, appropriate workload and assessment, & generic skills. Also, academic achievement among the postgraduate students is above average at 71.29.

Table 4: Showing difference in the course experiences among male and female postgraduate students

Variable	Statistics	Males	Females	SEM	t-ratio
Course Experiences	Mean	236.50	252.97	5.33	3.09*
	S.D	33.33	34.49		

* Denotes significance at .01 level

Table 4 reflects that the difference in the mean score on course experiences among males and females is significant at 0.01 level. The mean score on course experience perception among females (236.50) is higher than the mean score of the males.

Thus, hypothesis 1 stating: there is no significant difference in the course experiences among postgraduate students in relation to their gender is rejected.

Table 5: Showing difference in academic achievement among male and female postgraduate students

Variable	Statistics	Males	Females	SEM	t-ratio
Academic Achievement	Mean	66.66	73.6	1.29	5.38*
	S.D	8.54	7.45		

* Denotes significance at .01 level

Table 5 signifies that the difference in the mean score of academic achievement among males and females is significant at 0.01 level. The mean score on academic achievement among females is 73.6 which is higher than the mean score of the males i.e. 66.66.

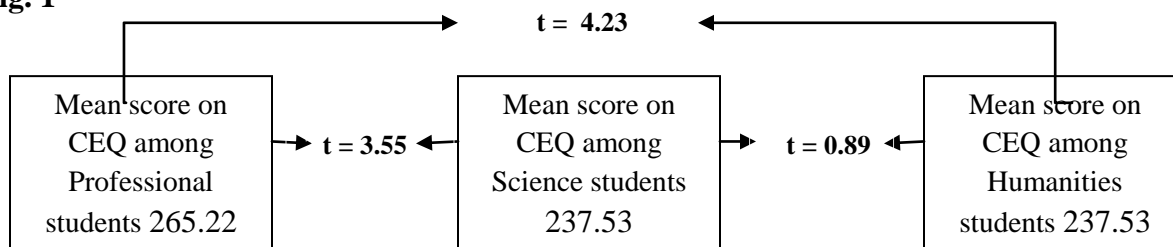
Thus, hypothesis 2 stating: there is no significant difference in the academic achievement of the postgraduate students in relation to their gender is rejected.

Table 6 Showing comparison of mean scores on course experiences of postgraduate students pursuing professional, science and humanities courses.

Group	N	Mean Score	S.D.	't'		
				Professional	Science	Humanities
Professional	48	265.22	29.69	0.00	3.55*	4.23*
Science	46	237.53	44.11	3.55*	0.00	0.89
Humanities	86	243.78	25.02	4.23*	0.89	0.00

* Denotes significance at .01 level

Fig. 1



The mean scores on course experiences among post-graduate students pursuing professional, science and humanities courses are 265.22, 237.53, and 243.78 respectively. Since the mean score is higher than 156 (average score on CEQ). Thus, the postgraduate students have positive course experience perceptions and this is indicative of their satisfaction with the course experiences i.e. teaching, student support, clear goals, appropriate workload and assessment, & generic skills.

On comparing the mean scores on course experiences among post graduate students in professional, science and humanities, it was found that the t-value indicating the difference in the mean score on course experiences among students pursuing professional and science courses is 3.55, which is significant at 0.01 level. The students pursuing professional course have better course experiences as compared to the students enrolled in sciences at post graduate level.

The mean score on course experiences among professional students is significantly higher than their counterparts pursuing humanities with t-value for the difference being 4.23 thus pertaining to better learning experiences among professional students.

Again, the t-value differentiating between the mean score on course experiences among science and humanities courses is 0.89 which is not significant. This indicates to the similar course experience perceptions among science and humanities course students pursuing post-graduation from Panjab University.

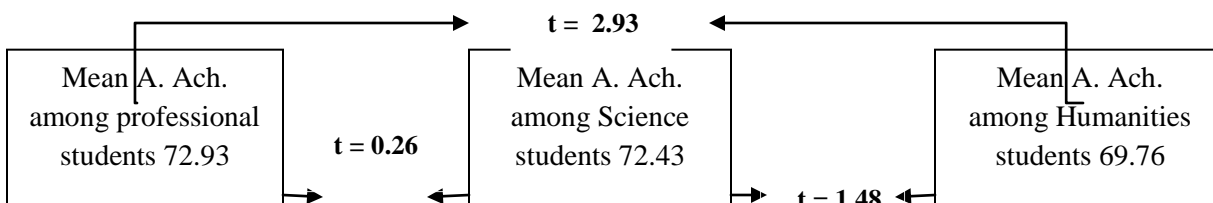
Hypothesis 3 stating there is no significant difference in the course experiences of students pursuing professional, science and humanities course is partially rejected on the basis of the results obtained.

Table 7 Showing comparison of mean scores on academic achievement among postgraduate students pursuing professional, science and humanities courses.

Group	N	Mean Score	S.D.	't'		
				Professional	Science	Humanities
Professional	48	72.93	6.99	0.00	0.26	2.93*
Science	46	72.43	10.99	0.26	0.00	1.48
Humanities	86	69.76	7.45	2.93*	1.48	0.00

* Denotes significance at .01 level

Fig. 2



The mean of academic achievement among post graduate students from professional, science and humanities is 72.93, 72.43 and 69.76. To find out whether the academic achievement among the postgraduate students from these three streams differed significantly the t-value was calculated.

The results obtained from table 7 revealed that the t-value comparing the academic achievement among the students from professional and science courses came out to be 0.26 which is not significant. Thus, the students pursuing professional and science courses do not differ significantly in their academic achievement. Similarly t-value for differentiating the academic achievement of students pursuing science and humanities courses was found out to be 1.48 again pointing towards no significant difference in the academic achievement among science and humanities students.

On comparing the academic achievement among students pursuing professional and humanities courses, the t-value which is 2.93 indicated towards higher academic achievement among the professional students.

Hypothesis 4 stating there is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students pursuing professional, science and humanities course is partly rejected.

Table 8 Comparison of academic achievement of postgraduate students in relation to their course experiences.

Academic achievement	't'
Mean and standard deviation of the academic achievement scores of higher 27% students on CEQ (M1= 79.74; S1=8.14)	7.01*
Mean and standard deviation of the academic achievement scores of lower 27% students on CEQ (M2=64.33; S2=7.93)	

* Denotes significance at .01 level

For comparing the academic achievement of the postgraduate students with higher score on course experience t-value obtained from the table above came out to be 7.01 which is significant

at 0.01 level. This clearly suggests that the students having better course experiences or higher satisfaction with the learning experiences during the course of their study have higher academic achievement than the students who are not satisfied with the course experiences.

Hypothesis 5 stating there is no significant difference in the academic achievement of postgraduate students in relation to their course experiences is rejected.

Conclusions:

- Male and female postgraduate students differ significantly in their course experiences and academic achievement. In both variables of the study females have higher mean score than their male counterparts. Females have better course experiences and higher academic achievement.
 - The students from different courses vary in their course experiences. Students pursuing professional courses have higher mean score on course experiences than the students pursuing science and humanities courses. The difference in the course experiences among students according to their course of study is significant.
 - There is a significant difference in the academic achievement of students pursuing professional and humanities courses. While, the difference in the academic achievement of professional and science students is not significant and this difference is insignificant for science and humanities students also.
 - Students having overall better course experiences have higher academic achievement.
- The research findings obtained from this study corroborate the findings of Richardson and Nausheen (2010) and Ning and Downing (2011,2011) where course experiences among the students correlated positively with their academic achievement. Thus, universities should strive for providing better course experiences to their students for achieving academic excellence.

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