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Navigating Marriage and Academic Engagement: A Phenomenological Study of University Students in Pakistan

Dr. Rabia Tabassum

Lecturer, Department of STEM Education, Faculty of Education Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Correspondence: rabia786@lcwu.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Jamil

Lecturer, Department of Education Government College Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: m.jamil@gcwus.edu.pk

Dr. Mahvish Fatima Kashif

Assistant Professor, Department of STEM Education, Faculty of Education Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of marriage on academic engagement among Pakistani university students. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research design, data were gathered through focus group discussions with 10 purposively selected married students from a university in Punjab. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. According to the findings, married students implement advanced time management methods that combine planning sessions alongside arrangement ranking to handle their academic and family duties. Academic success strongly depends on spousal support because spouses provide emotional motivation and practical help to their students. Students succeeded by using effective communication methods and compromised abilities to work out agreements with their spouses and instructors regarding simultaneous demands on their time. Marriage brought emotional stability, although extra responsibilities between students and their spouses created stress that resulted in sleep disturbances. The marriage experience brought significant commitments that students handled through independent study and careful selection of campus involvement. Research shows that marriage provides academic resilience benefits when students receive proper backing. The research results help develop insights into the interplay between marriage and academic challenges within the Pakistani cultural environment.

Keywords: Marriage, Academic engagement, Academic performance, Qualitative research, Pakistani university students.



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Introduction

Marriage calls for dedication, unity, interaction, thoughtful preparation that leads to a very practical aspect of life i.e., thought a step towards maturity (Erikson, 1950). Therefore, in Pakistani culture, it is supposed to have positive effect over young ones that keeps them safe from the bad habits such as getting involved in the sinful acts e.g., illegal emotional or physical engagements (Ullah et al., 2017).

Another school of thought inspired by Western culture is that a person should attain sufficient social and economic independence before marriage (Hartarto & Wibowo, 2023). However, a general drawback of this concept is that if a person does not achieve a good economic status at the optimum age stage, he experiences different physical and mental distortions that lead to psychological personality issues (Iqbal et al., 2022).

Moreover, a third concept also emerges in the Pakistani scenario: in search of a job or seeking some proper status, people do doctorate as well. Moreover, while, this course, they try to secure their age for marriage as well (Iqbal et al., 2021a; Tabassum & Akhter, 2020). Thus, an odd situation with two different cases is observed in Pakistan i.e., early marriage cases (Sharma et al., 2022) and late marriage cases (Naved et al., 2022) both with study and social struggle. Thus, Pakistani students suffer a situation in which they have to combat two important engagements: study and marriage. Both affect each other in a reciprocal way. This study explores these issues in terms of their extent of reciprocity.

Partnership affects a scholar's academic performance in addition to their professional and personal aspirations regarding time, energy, and emotional engagement (DiGiuseppe & Haer, 2023). The usual leisure time that a student usually spends in his scholastic activities is spent in their marital and personal settings. However, such engagements affect their scholastic and professional growth (Hwang et al., 2019). Therefore, to promote the development and achievement of married academics, it is necessary to investigate the potential effects of weddings on student involvement, given that they place constraints on researchers' availability, stamina, and priorities.

Data on the relationship between study and marriage indicate that it influences student engagement. Classroom engagement is conceptualized as showing active classroom participation, showing good classroom adjustments, and establishing good communication with fellows and teachers in the educational institution. Three areas of student participation have been established in the research: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive (Sypniewska et al., 2023).

This study explored the impact of marriage on students' study engagement. It highlights the need for family support, raises public awareness about the educational problems that married students experience, and encourages policymakers to act for accessible, family friendly policies in education.

For university administration, the study may provide help to design curricula and special support services for married students, assisting faculty in changing teaching tactics, and providing insights for students balancing marriage and education.

Study engagement reflects the relationship between students and various academic elements, including instructors and peers. Accurate data on pupil engagement help institutions make informed decisions rather than rely on anecdotal evidence. By focusing on engagement with married life, the study may be crucial for increasing awareness among the students themselves and their responsiveness towards study requirements.

Research Objective

- To explore the impact of marriage on academic engagement among university students.

Literature Review

Students' involvement is correlated with personal development. Institutions that engage in meaningful activities are of high quality, and their support, such as counselling and childcare, can help married students navigate their academic experiences. Raising awareness of the unique needs of married students can inform academic interventions and support strategies (Roikonen & Häkkinen, 2019). It is linked to multifaceted issues like low achievement, boredom, disaffection and high dropout rates (Nasrabad et al., 2024).

Study engagement requires competent faculty members to foster student engagement with their subject matter expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and interpersonal skills (Adedini et al., 2022) as different skills have been focused on being twenty first century skills (Ahmad et al., 2024; Jamil et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2022). It is dependent upon several factors such as gender (Tabassum et al., 2024), family support (Tabassum et al., 2020a) and age and span of marriage (Ullah et al., 2017).

Naik et al. (2024) examined the impact of gender and family support on academic satisfaction among postdocs and faculty. Their findings indicated that strong family support is crucial for high academic satisfaction, particularly in balancing family and career, as there is an impact of teachers' work-family conflict on the performance of their children (Sajid et al., 2022). The literature indicates that females suffer more issues than males while running marital and study life simultaneously. They have to cater increased family responsibilities, which may detract them from their career focus (Iqbal et al., 2021b; Tabassum et al., 2020b).

Thus, keeping study and marriage together requires some special competencies that can negatively impact academic performance, including stress and time management. Moreover, tackling social pressures, managing sleep schedules, and financial concerns (Ullah et al., 2017). Deane (2021) and Siddiqui & Greene (2022) identified seven areas of adaptation and development for college students, including academic responsibilities and emotional management.

In international scenarios, studies on Turkish, Zambia and Bedouin women have found that marriage impacts gender stereotypes, particularly for women (DiGiuseppe & Haer, 2023; Engkus, 2023; Hartarto & Wibowo, 2023; Nahdhiyah et al., 2022; Ragab & Saad, 2023; Salsavira et al., 2021). It was also observed that married female undergraduates experienced worse adjustment in college due to the dual burden of academic and household responsibilities, leading to increased stress and decreased academic performance. Single students benefit from social support systems that are less accessible to married students, particularly young married women.

Kakal et al. (2023) explored the factors influencing marriage intimacy, highlighting the importance of emotional support, communication, and mutual understanding between partners. This understanding is particularly relevant for married college students who face unique challenges during this transitional phase. Strong marital bonds can help students effectively manage both marriage and academic pressures (Shakya et al., 2020). Spouse intimacy was observed as elevating the level of family and emotional support to improve academic competence and reduced anxiety (Paul et al., 2023). Juraqulova et al. (2015) explore the experiences of first-generation college students, focusing on the impact of family roles on their independence and transition to college life. The issues related to marriage and study also indicated that such overburdened minds may sometimes face mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, which significantly affect academic performance (Dessauvagie et al., 2022). That is why study engagement is taken as a

complex psycho-social construct that involves students' decisions and behaviors in their academic pursuits as learning behaviour is influenced by teacher student interaction (Niazi et al., 2025).

Research Methodology

This was a qualitative study with a phenomenological research design. This research design was used to explore participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016), as cited by Anjum et al. (2021). The study employed a purposive sampling strategy to select ten married participants from a public university in Punjab, as this sampling technique is used to select participants fulfilling the purpose (Iqbal et al., 2022). Focus group interviews were conducted for data collection from the study sample, as this technique is used with a small group of participants between six and nine (Denscombe, 2007). Thematic data analysis was conducted using a six-phase approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis involves coding the data and identifying patterns or themes that emerge from focus group discussions.

Findings of the Study

The following table explores the derived theme, responses, and relevant codes extracted from the focus group discussion data.

Impact of marriage on the study engagement among university students

Themes	Responses	Codes	Occurrence
Balancing Academic and Marital Responsibilities	<i>"Thus, to be able to devote time to both my spouse and my academic progress, I developed an elaborate schedule of the week in which days and hours are assigned to each class, study time, and time spent with my partner. This structured approach enables me to complete all my academic obligations accompanied by the needs of my spouse. The advantage of this strategy is that it offers direction on how to proceed and thus minimizes stress while, at the same time allowing for time to be spent on both critical aspects of life."</i> <i>"I am still able to meet the demands of studying and be able to fulfill my marital duties by organizing the tasks according to the level of their priorities. For instance, after whatever I am engaged in academically, I see to it that I do my cleaning and other non-critical chores. This way of working enables me to do my homework and not let chores take me all away, and yet there may be tension if there are a lot of chores to do."</i> <i>"I manage my college classes and marriage by establishing certain hours of the day</i>	Management Strategies	9

when I will not be disturbed for studying and then telling my husband. This understanding helps my spouse to give me space to study or doing my academic work without having to disturb me severely. The main benefit is improved concentration and productivity, but it can sometimes lead to feelings of guilt for not spending more time together."

"Balancing my studies and marriage commitments is made easier with the support of my spouse, who takes on more household responsibilities during my exam periods. This support allows me to focus entirely on my studies, reducing my stress levels and improving my academic performance. The benefit is the enhanced ability to concentrate on exams, but it can sometimes create a sense of imbalance in our household duties."

Support
Systems

4

"My family plays a crucial role in helping me balance my studies and marriage commitments by providing childcare support. This assistance frees up my time to focus on my coursework and attend classes without worrying about my child's well-being. The benefit is increased availability for my studies, but relying on family support can sometimes make me feel dependent and concerned about imposing on them."

"I can easily find myself overwhelmed by my course work and demands from my spouse so there is need to always sit and discuss our timetable. To my understanding, this communication helps subdue conflicts to ensure we are responsive to each other's needs. The advantage is that there will be co-ordination between the two or more individuals or parties and also time will be managed properly but this depends on the compromise of two individuals. "

Communicati
on and
Compromise

5

"My spouse and I juggle our schedules because, with the help of some distinct agreement on when we can attend outings, we make sure to stay married despite the packed work schedules. This plan can be of

considerable help for a couple to spend time together and also reinforce the relation between two people. The benefit is a healthy relationship, but there could be some times that it is hard to follow through these plans when there are tough examinations."

"As for my marriage, I explained that when personal emergencies occur, I can talk to my professors to adjust the due dates for assignment submissions. This has enabled me to balance between the academic requirements and the marital responsibilities without straining any of the two. The gain is the absence of pressure and preparedness for crisis solutions, but it suggests that I have to be tolerant to the change of schedule with my professors and my husband or wife."

The analysis shows different approaches that university students with married status use to handle their academic processes alongside their spousal responsibilities. Three thematic codes—Management Strategies, Support Systems, and Communication and Compromise—comprise the data and their occurrences total nine, four, and five, respectively. Further explanation of these thematic codes is as follows.

1. Management Strategies (9 occurrences)

This sub-theme represents the most frequently mentioned approach, indicating its central importance in married students' lives. The responses revealed three key management strategies:

- **Structured Scheduling:** Students are assigned an entire week at one time, then detail exactly when they will do academic work, classes, and marital responsibilities. It is a systematic way of doing things that tends to alleviate some stress, as it does not allow one responsibility to take over the other.
- **Task Prioritization:** Since academic work is a priority over household chores, students often rank tasks by importance. Thus, using this hierarchical approach, not only is the educational characteristic fulfilled yet the marital duty to maintain family is also retained, especially when there is a heavy domestic workload.
- **Boundary Setting:** Laying out physical boundaries, such as setting specific times for study or not working on certain types of tasks, will be a part of the students' communication with their spouse. However, it sets up protected periods in which concentration and productivity increase — at the cost of guilt that spouse time has been reduced.

2. Support Systems (4 occurrences)

This sub-theme plays a critical role to the extent of this theme.:

- **Spousal Support:** During exams, partners take on extra child responsibilities to allow students to concentrate on their studies.

- **Family Assistance:** Extended family gives you family assistance by providing childcare support so you can focus on academic pursuits. However, this dependency makes us feel indebted to family members and extremely concerned about imposing on family members.

3. Communication and Compromise (5 occurrences)

This sub-theme emphasizes the importance of dialogue and flexibility:

- **Regular Discussion:** Couples maintain open communication about schedules and expectations to minimize conflicts and ensure mutual understanding.
- **Shared Agreements:** Partners establish specific times for relationship maintenance despite busy schedules, although these plans may be difficult to maintain during intensive academic periods.
- **Academic Flexibility:** Students negotiate with professors for deadline adjustments during personal emergencies, demonstrating the need for an institutional understanding of married students' unique challenges.

Discussion

This research provides detailed knowledge on how marriage complicates students' academic involvement in Pakistani universities. University students with marital relationships face several challenges that may hinder them from being in class, but they will prove to be highly resilient by coming up with ways of coping. For Pakistani university students who marry, time management functions as the primary solution. This agreement is with Ullah et al. (2017), who found that Pakistani students have to handle two major tasks at once. The fact that the formal scheduling system indicates that the participants are yet able to handle two roles shows how advanced in personal development they are in maturity, since Erikson (1950) considered marriage to be a needful step for personal development in maturity. Student mental health sustained in the findings of Dessauvage et al. (2022) is due to stress from competing commitments. This research has an essential outcome in terms of the committed support students receive from their spouses in terms of their academic success. The spouses both practically help by taking on additional duties around the house during exam periods, and they give emotional support. Research suggests the West's idea of academic decline as one goes on to wed is unfounded (Hartarto & Wibowo, 2023; Kusters et al., 2017). For the two roles to be managed successfully, there needs to be effective communication and compromise systems between the colleagues involved. As per Naik et al. (2024), findings have suggested that to address students' satisfaction in the academic end as well as adjust their academic schedule and expectations, family support is expected to be strong with regular communication. Faculty negotiation for deadline extensions should be permitted for married students according to Roikonen and Häkkinen (2019), since institutions should establish academic interventions for them. Marriage creates reduced academic strain and absorbs new obligations that may harm the sleep cycle and be physically reducing all at once. Furthermore, Mofatteh (2021) confirms that marital conflicts have a big effect in that they place a lot in students' stress and hinder educational concentration. This study identifies the ways in which management approaches become complex among students who choose to marry. Another Pakistani cultural belief, marriage, makes them responsible and developing as a personality (Ullah et al., 2017). It was found that married students should have a system of individual tactics, family network cooperation, and educational institution recognition for academic involvement success. Therefore, this study requires university policies to utilize interventions that are specifically targeted to assist students with their particular problems. When students juggle with more than one task (Adedini et al., 2022), institutional support will have a very large impact on academic performance.

Conclusion

This study provides necessary information about married Pakistani university students on how they deal with academic and marital commitments. There are numerous academic problems faced by married students for which institutions can provide appropriate developmental opportunities to support them. The research proves that married students succeed in their studies through three essential academic dimensions, including the approach of managing techniques and spouse-based help provided by their marriage and the marital communication pattern. Advanced time organization abilities are required for excellent dual-role management, which will lead students in the proper direction to purpose-built methods of dealing with a multiplicity of obligations. The central role played by spousal support in encouraging and offering practical help to students makes academic persistence possible. Flexible situations are provided to cope with academic-marital conflict and overcome academic-marital conflict through strong communication skills and compromise between partners, their families, and educational institutions. The effects of dual role handling on human health also have complex aspects and some elements. The emotional support that a stable marriage would offer students would help them persist in the course, while extra duties may cause stress, sleep problems, and mental fatigue, which is infrequent. Universities need to provide a complete helping structure to support the academic development and personal well-being needs of married students as per research demand. The research findings show that marriage does not inhibit a student's successful completion of higher education, but if properly supported, the student can be successful in both the education and marriage domains. Therefore, policies for higher education institutions in Pakistan should consider those specific challenges of married students by supporting such programs. This demographic should be given special counselling and programs that allow them to adjust to the scheduling capacities, while the institutions should organize educational campaigns to instruct faculty regarding this student demographic.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Educational institutions should advertise products that can help married students with a combination of academic and marital life that include counselling assistance, stress reduction product services, and student networking service groups to share marital experiences and adaptive solutions.
2. Academic institutions should implement adaptive scheduling procedures to enable married students to fit their studies versus marriage commitments with similar academic session arrangements or remote education to support night and weekend sessions.
3. The faculty should undergo proper training to understand existing married student needs and develop means of communication with these students with regard to deadline adjustments when there are emergencies in the family or when there is a need to perform other marital duties that do not incur academic sanctions.
4. Universities should also deliver childcare installations and peaceful study zones for students with families and family member-friendly welcome initiatives to assist spouses in understanding academic requirements.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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