

Impact of Psychological Capital on Academic Performance and Study Stress among Second Year Undergraduates of KDU

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Abstract: When compared to researches about job performance, a little attention has been given to academic performance. Psychological capital (PsyCap) and study stress are major concepts when it comes to academic performance. During the first year, many undergraduates find it difficult to adjust themselves to the new university environment and to face unexpected study stress suddenly due to exams and continuous assignments in their second year as well. Therefore, very few may overcome those challenges due to their strong positive psychological resources. Others may get affected due to their unbearable stress. Therefore, this study examines the impact of PsyCap and study stress on academic performance among second year undergraduates of KDU. The study adopted the mixed research design. A random sample of 128 students (n=128) were given a structured questionnaire and interviews for key informants. Regression analysis using SPSS in quantitative approach and thematic analysis in qualitative approach were used to analyse the data. Study results indicate that PsyCap of second year undergraduates has a significant and positive impact on their academic performance. However, a higher level of study stress affects negatively on academic performance, but it was not a significant impact. Furthermore, this study highlights the ways in which PsyCap of undergraduates could be further enhanced. Nevertheless, maintaining a moderate level of study stress is possible to generate better academic performance. As future research,

researchers intend to consider other state and private university undergraduates in all streams. More importantly, key informants stress on the importance of mitigating higher stress levels among undergraduates.

Keywords: Psychological capital, Study stress, Academic performance, Positive organizational behaviour

Introduction

Psychological Capital (PsyCap) was first introduced by Dr. Fred Luthans in the University of Nebraska- Lincoln. He found a concept called positive PsyCap. Psychological capital is known as the positive psychological development of an individual which includes main four components as HERO. Hope is a feeling of trust, Efficacy is the ability to achieve a target, Resilience means ability to overcome quickly from barriers and Optimism is the confidence. The term HERO is used to introduce psychological capital as an abbreviation of components and generally HERO is a person who is admired for achievements and courage. PsyCap can be varying from one person to another in every person as well as in every undergraduate with related to study.

Due to continuous assignments, exams and class tests and lack of social relations many undergraduates are undergoing with study stress. However, a student with higher PsyCap can defeat the negative outcomes of study stress. But some may suffer with depression and phobia because they cannot control those academic pressure or stress and those will

directly affect for their academic performances. This study aims to examine the impact of Psychological Capital on academic performances while testing the relationship between study stress and academic performance among second year undergraduates. As second year undergraduates are well experienced from their first year due to continuous exams, assignments and not being familiar the university surrounding. Further due to lack of social relations and separation of parents, the study has focused on their first-year academic performance. Considering about the problem statement, in order to fulfil objectives people should have the confidence and as well as positive thinking, but some circumstances like stress, depression and phobia etc. may cause as a barrier in fulfilling individuals' tasks. But also, positive stress can be help to create moral thinking in student mind, helps to work effectively and efficiently, to make strategic objectives, easy to handle work breakdown success. Even though, positive stress may even help to develop a student, most of students may suffer with negative stress. Previous studies have found that the most of the undergraduates undergo with phobia, depression and stress due to their academic work load and maybe for some other causes as well, like lack of social relations in the university surrounding and also the separation from the parents. But some are having the capacity to solve these situations and achieve their objectives. We are predicting that kind of people have high psychological capital in order to overcome the situations like stress. In this study we are examining how capable were the second-year students dealt with study stress by their psychological capital and the impact of psychological capital towards their first-year academic performances due to changes in the surroundings. The moment this research was conducted, the second-year undergraduates have not received the results for the second-

year academics. Therefore, this study is focussed on their first-year academic results with all experiences in first year. Our Research is based on both research questions and hypothesis as it is conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative approach will be used to recognize the ground level of study whereas the qualitative study will help to realize its philosophical understanding.

A. *Field of Study*

Luthans, states that the concept of psychological capital is known as an individual's positive psychological state of development. When focusing further about the concept of positive psychological capital, Psychological capital is focusing on the last decades with the concern of present working conditions and expectations of employees in gaining competitive advantage. It is said that there is clear evidence that positive psychological capital has contributed a lot to gain employees' desired outputs and to supply new ideas to understand and to manage potentially the negative and stressful organizational situations. Therefore, when it comes to disciplines of organizational behaviour and industrial and organizational psychology, the concepts of psychological capital and stress are most important. At present, Study stress is considered as a deep concept which has driven further from the field of stress. There can be several kinds of stress but for a student, study stress is one of the most suffering situations which they may face at school or at university. There is eustress and distress which are main concepts of stress, so, the psychiatrists believe that the stress should be in a moderate level for a person to perform well in something that they engage.

The rationale of the research is that the most researches are completed mainly based on the PsyCap among employees in several organizations. But this study is worth because

it has proved that if PsyCap is measured in organizational basis to improve employee performance which has a greater positive level, it can also make effort for a student performance towards their academic performance. If students undergo with stress, this study examines whether it is possible to deal with the stress and overcome from the problems to perform well in academics. Also, it has explained the remedies which a university can take in order to build PsyCap as in positive individual among undergraduates by reducing stress. As this study is a mix research the research questions can be created as:

Research Questions:

1. Which factors determine the level of Psychological Capital among second year undergraduates?
2. How Psychological Capital of students' can be further improved in a defence university.

Literature Review

a. Foundation for PsyCap

About a decade ago, the positive psychology movement emerged as a reaction to the obsession that psychology has traditionally had with the pathological, predominantly negative aspects of human functioning and behavior. Therefore, as the former president of American Psychological Association Martin Seligman and some of his colleagues believed that too much attention in their field was centred on what was wrong with people and little attention was being directed toward the positive qualities and characteristics of individuals or what was right with people. The purpose of the positive psychology movement is to use as a scientific method to examine and wellbeing, make people's strengths rather than being concerned about their weaknesses. So, the emphasis is on optimum functioning of humans as opposed to pathological

functioning of humans. ('Seligman_2000_Positive', no date)

Dr. Luthans found a concept called Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) and described as the "the analysis and application of positively focused human resource strengths and psychological skills that can be assessed, built and managed effectively to enhance performance in the workplace of today" (Luthans, 2002) and also he identified a specific inclusion criteria to distinguish POB and its mainly constructs from the popular self-help or even traditional positively oriented organizational behavior constructs (Luthans *et al.*, 2007) The positive psychology movement and the subsequent POB, PsyCap also identified as going beyond traditional economic capital, human capital, and social capital and also consist of who you are and what you can become (Luthans, Luthans and Luthans, 2004) While there are several applicants who can be drawn from positive psychology to operationalize this PsyCap, those have been selected to best meet the above mentioned inclusion requirements includes hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism and are described as a core construct is defined as, an individual's positive psychological state of development mainly characterized by having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks, making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future, preserving toward the goals and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed and when the best by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success. (Luthans, 2002).

The best definition for PsyCap can be found in the literature can be viewed as follows:

"an individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by: (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the

necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success”(Avey *et al.*, 2010)

b. Psychological capital and student academic performance

When it comes to the relationship between the various psychological constructs that make up PsyCap individually (i.e. hope, efficacy, resilience or optimism) or sometimes two of them on the impact regarding the impact of student academic performance. For example, according to Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory and defined for application to performance as “one's conviction about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources or courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Hobfoll, 2002) was shown to be a strong predictor of first year college student academic performance and also through a meta-analysis, Valentine, Dubois and Cooper (2004) found efficacy was shown to be a strong predictor of academic success.

So, along with the psychological construct of optimism, an individual makes and the explanatory style an individual uses in response to situations and events and it linked to academic performance as well. For example, several studies shown, that students with more positive perspectives considerably outperform those with negative perspectives in the classroom (Ruthig *et al.*, 2004) As the third psychological resource in the core construct of PsyCap hope is characterized as a “positive motivational state based on an interactively derived sense of successful and pathways. As the final PsyCap variable

resilience is defined a person's ability to bounce back or rebound when faced with disappointing outcomes, failures or even positive changes and events. (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007) According to the above literature findings, the following hypothesis can be created;

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between PsyCap and students' academic performance.

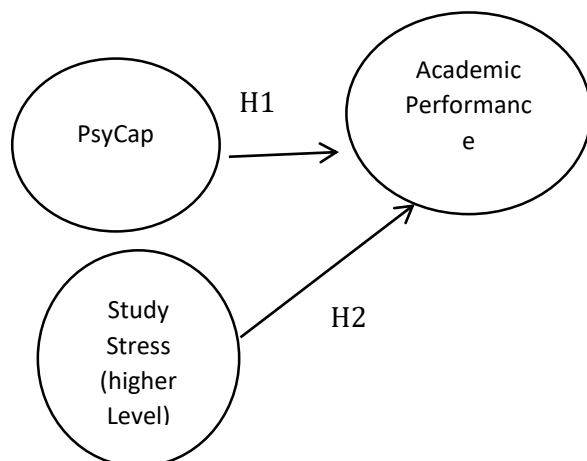
c. Study Stress and Academic Performance

Considering about the Academic Performance and Study stress, Academic problems have been reported as the common kind of stress when it comes to the students in schools and universities, (Aldwin and Greenberger, 1987) As an example, (Schafer, 1996) questioned about the stressful daily life from the college students. Then he observed that most irritating stresses were by school related stresses like studying workload pressure, limited time, writing exam papers, taking tests and future plans as well as boring instructors. The stresses which are associated with academic activities has been engaged into various negative outcomes such as poor health, (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987) depression (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987) and also poor academic performance (Saipanish, 2003). Aldwin Greenberg in 1987 found that the perceived stress of academic was related to the depression among college students. Therefore, many studies have proved and found a relationship between academic performance and study stress (Akgun and Ciarrochi, 2003). Students are experiencing high level of academic pressure because of continuous assignments, exams, time pressure, grade pressure and uncertainty. So, as a summary, this stress has an impact on their academic performance. So, in this study we are examining the relationship between study stress and academic performance of second year undergraduates of our university KDU.

Therefore, this following second hypothesis can be created.

H2: There is a significant negative relationship between study stress (higher level) and students' academic performance.

Research Model



Experimental Design

1) Philosophy

The beginning of the field of psychology was started with some of concepts regarding to examine what was right with people and what contributes human flourishing and growth capacity. Mainly the positive focus was emerged in the field of clinical psychology which was then extended to workplace by influencing in both the value of micro oriented positivity in individually as well as macro-oriented positivity in organization. PsyCap is already existed in the organizational background and personal development. It distinguished PsyCap from other concepts. PsyCap helps to share a positive relationship among individuals and firm besides motivating organizational and individual performance. Forbes discovered a positive relationship between efficacies which is a basic component of PsyCap with entrepreneurial performance as well. On the other hand, well-being can be defined as a secondary related to optimism with a positive relationship (D.P.Forbes, 2005). As a conclusion related component of

psychological capital, there are different and inter-related relationships between concepts and basic components of psychological capital. The positive relationship between self-efficacy and satisfaction bring along the positive relationship between self-efficacy and performance.

The main concepts which have been used in this study are psychological capital and study stress. It is true that the negative effect of study stress will affect an individual's performance but the positive stress is also can be taken as a motivator to work hard when considering about the factors of this particular study.

Research Approach

The research study is based on a Mix Approach which consisted with both quantitative and qualitative in order to get more accurate and in-depth data as findings. The survey was conducted using structured questionnaire with related to quantitative data and the case study-based questions were asked in the interviews when gathering qualitative data. The data analysis was done through SPSS software for quantitative data and thematic approach was used to analyse qualitative data. Therefore, both inductive and deductive methods were used to get results from the study.

Data Collection Methods, Tools and Analysis

For the quantitative data collection procedure, the population of research is chosen as the Second Year Undergraduates of KDU among private universities because of the convenience due to the limited amount of time. Second Year is the well experienced year after handling the first year with sudden academic pressure, which they get to know the university surrounding better. Among Second Year Undergraduates of KDU, the sample is taken from the main three faculties due to the higher rate of undergraduates.

Main subgroups were selected by using stratified sampling in order to get more accurate data and to highlight specific subgroups according to the interest of the study. Sample (n=100%= 128 Undergraduates).

From the total amount of second year 583 undergraduates, the strata were identified from the faculties which have a higher rate of students as, from the Faculty of Engineering: 45%= 111 undergraduates, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences 25% = 05 students from each five of their departments and from the Faculty of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities as 12%= 08 Logistic Management Undergraduates, 2% = 02 Management and Technical Science Undergraduates and 8% = 2 Social Sciences Second Year Undergraduates to the total sample of n=100% which is 128 undergraduates. This research used Online Survey method which is an online structured questionnaire. Judgemental Sampling was also used in order to collect qualitative data from a Senior Lecturer / Mentor at KDU and from a Psychiatrist of KDU Hospital based on in depth interviews.

The quantitative data collection was followed by a five likert scale online questionnaire. The questionnaire was consisted with three statements with related to Hope, Two statements in Self-Efficacy, three related to Resilience and six statements regarding Optimism in five likert scale questions. (1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree) and the analysis was done by using SPSS Software.

2) Measures

Demographic Data Analysis

The demographic analysis was focused on mainly the age, faculty, gender, hometown, daily transport method, GPA rate, religion, nationality, the way they got to know about KDU and hobbies etc. in order to check whether these demographic factors affects

second year undergraduates' academic performance and study stress.

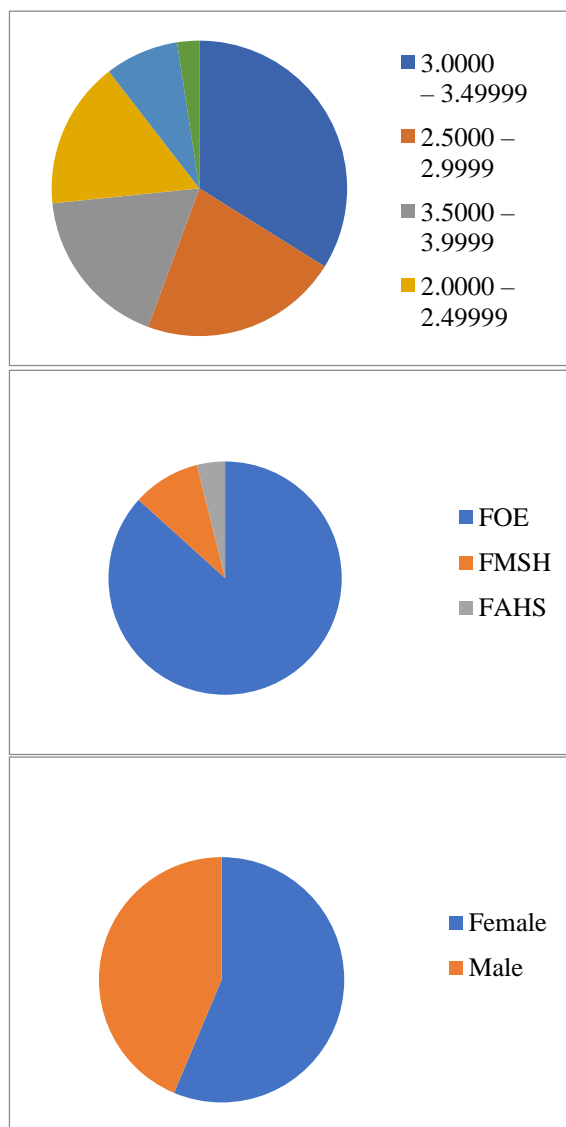


Figure 1 to 3: Sample data

In the quantitative analysis, the study aims in finding how strong and the negative the relationship between PsyCap, academic performance and study stress is. Therefore, the research has used SPSS software in order to show the appropriate measures. Those can be represented in a table mentioned as follows.

Table 1. Measurement model assessment

Construct	Items	Loadings	α
Psyscap	PsyHo1	0.759	
	PsyHo2	0.789	
	PsyHo3	0.8	
	PsySE1	0.692	
	PsySE2	0.827	
	PsyR1	0.569	
	PsyR2	0.564	
	PsyO1	0.748	
	PsyO2	0.733	
	PSyO3	0.671	
	PsyO4	0.546	
	PsyO5	0.732	
	PsyO6	0.67	0.779
Study stress	SS1	0.617	
	SS2	0.754	
	SS3	0.748	
	SS4	0.926	
	SS5	0.926	
	SS6	0.783	
	SS7	0.781	0.754
Ac.per	Ap1	0.86	
	Ap2	0.849	
	Ap3	0.867	
	Ap4	0.841	0.408

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

	Mean	Std.Deviation	Ac Per	PsyCap
AcPer	3.2305	.60070		
PsyCap	3.7512	.50164	0.462*	
Stress	2.9844	.71152	-0.49	0.081

Table 3. Regression (R^2) Results for PsyCap, Study Stress and Academic Performance

Hypotheses	R^2	B	F. Value	Significance
Ho		0.553	34.124	0.000
H1	0.221=22 %			
H2		-0.042	0.308	0.58
Ho				

Results

We have tested three factors like how related the questions in the questionnaire succeeded to find the impact when it comes to α value, the co-relation of three factors PsyCap, Academic performance and Study Stress and the regression analysis in order to check how significant is the relationship between PsyCap and Study stress as well as PsyCap and academic performance.

A) Results from Quantitative Analysis

Table 1 presents that all the loadings were responsively higher than nominal threshold of 0.5 but here in the variable of academic performance, the average has become 0.4, so, it interprets that there is a quite small relationship in the items of academic performance Variables such as in PsyCap and study stress similarly gained the scores concerning composite reliability a higher rate than the recommended value (0.70) these scores are basically noted to assure the convergent validity and so the results have shown its achievement in Psyscap and study stress as the main determinants of academic performance. Table 1 indicates that the study has responsively attained significant convergent reliability and scale validity.

Table 2 represents the correlation, there is significance relationship between psychological capital (independent variable) and academic performance (dependent variable) with the rate of 0.462**. So, it means that there is a positive and significant

relationship of PsyCap towards academic performances of second year undergraduates. With the comparison between PsyCap and study stress, study stress looks like that there is no significance but negative weaker relationship. But it predicts that when the stress is increased, undergraduates will demotivate to perform well in academics. Between study stress and academic performance there is a negative relationship as -0.049 and there is a lower relationship between PsyCap and study stress as 0.081 .

When referring to the Table 3, β value is 0.553 between PsyCap (Independent variable) and academic performance (dependent variable). In addition, the independent variable of PsyCap: the R^2 value, β value, F value is high as well as the significance is also 0.000 . If the $\beta > 0.5$, it shows that there is a high impact, so, this study indicates that the PsyCap has a high impact towards second year undergraduates' academic performance. It clearly shows that when students' PsyCap increases the academic performance also increases. So, the independent variables explain 22% of dependent variable. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H1) was acceptable and null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected. When comparing study stress with academic performance, β is -0.042 , F value is very low (0.308) and also insignificant (P Value is $0.58 > 0.5$), it should be less than 0.5 . In summary, there is a very weak and insignificant negative relationship among the study stress and academic performance. So, it means that the null hypothesis (H_{2o}) is accepted and alternative hypothesis (H₂) is rejected. That means there is a negative relationship between study stress and academic performance but there is no huge impact towards it.

B) Results from Qualitative Analysis

In the qualitative analysis, this study has used thematic approach in order to take appropriate results. Therefore, there are five main themes which are created with related

to answers given by the interviewees that can be help to explain the determinants further.

- a. Factors Determining the PsyCap
- b. Remedies for build-up Psychological Capital in universities
- c. Study stress as a motivation
- d. Developing PsyCap along with stress among undergraduates' factors determining PsyCap

When explaining each theme in detail, the following explanations can support as qualitative findings in order to show the how PsyCap is important for an undergraduate as well as how an undergraduate can overcome study stress.

a. Factors determining PsyCap.

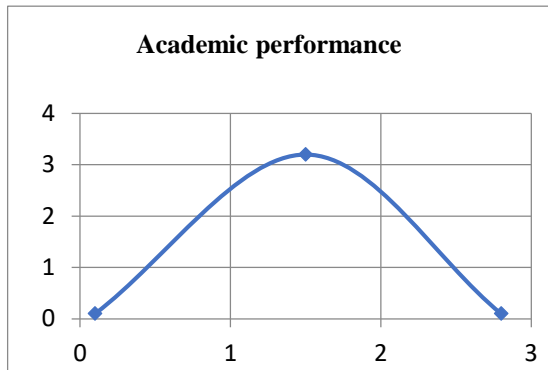
According to the information gathered from in depth interviews, the determinants of Psychological Capital can be listed as, fulfilling desired goals, Leadership goals, building confidence, Goal orientation, Accepting challenges, Motivation and Successful planning.

b. Remedies for build-up Psychological Capital in universities

Regarding the concept of PsyCap as an individual university surrounding can play a major role to build up PsyCap on undergraduates like academic staff should give challenges to students. Along with this kind of things students will get know people start making their own plans as well self-motivating them toward success. The other remedy is organizing academic programs to develop and open up leadership opportunities. For example, give them to conduct a first aid camp. These factors tend to increase their engagement. The other factor is creating the university system as a challenging system. This tends to motivate students bear up the challenges and get experiences and also through these remedies they can increase their PsyCap.

c. *Study stress as a motivation*

The qualitative analysis proved that the study stress is not always negative, it's quite positive because to achieve study goal a person should have the stress and also it will be led to plan and motivate towards building inner PsyCap.



Eustress ←————→ Distress

The stress which can be bearable

According to this curve when stress increases academic performance also increases. So, stress is a helper regarding our studies. If we cannot get stress, we cannot do our studies in a best manner. So, stress motivates us do our studies well and also it may also reduce our academic performance. Everyone should have a particular stress level in their bodies. When stress become lower, we call it eustress and when stress become higher, we call it as distress. So, as the conclusion study stress is not always negative it helps to perform our academics well.

d. *Strategies taken by policy makers, educationalists and parents*

In order to develop PsyCap in students the policy makers, educationists and parents should play a major role since their childhood. As policymakers they should be aware of the psychological capacity and the interest of the students rather than failing them in exams, they should be able to do researches and identify the mistakes and get analytical knowledge for students in an applicable manner. As educationists should actually do a

survey to see the education system and should take proper decisions.

e. *Developing PsyCap along with stress among undergraduates*

Our analysis proved that the study stress should need up to a certain level for a student in order to motivate. Doing a sport, engage in meditation, doing music and dancing are the actions a students can take when he/she get stress and also student should make a deadline for their own work as well as they should be able to plan all their studying time and other activities because it proves that students should make plans and have little bit of stress in order to do a better and effective performance by motivation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of PsyCap and study stress both on academic performance. It was hypothesised that academic stress can have a significant negative impact towards studies and PsyCap can have a significant effect on academic performance. The quantitative results shown proved that there is a significant effect of PsyCap as an impact on second year undergraduates' academic performance and there is an effect of study stress as well but it is not a significant negative impact which means study stress also should be there as a motivator. In the literature we found that many of the studies have proved the importance of PsyCap when it comes to the performance of human being and also how a stress can be a motivator not only for academics but for office work as well. Therefore, the Students should need to increase their PsyCap for good academic performance by taking bearable stress as a positive factor which will motivate for good performance. From the findings it can conclude that the second-year undergraduates have a greater impact as a

percentage of twenty-two (22%) on PsyCap towards their academic performance and other factors may influence the remaining from the quantitative data which we analysed. But this means that it has a greater influence in their studies.

Even though we believe that the study stress is demotivating and depressing students. But it proved that study stress also should be there in order to motivate and to direct to their academics. Therefore, this study suggests that the university surrounding should be friendly to the undergraduates and the staff, parents should identify the students' capacity and they should give more and more challenges to deal with so that the student will develop her/his PsyCap on own. Parents should not force their students to study they should let their children to take challenges of her/his own. It will directly influence the psychological strength of an undergraduates as well as a school student as we identified from the qualitative data.

Therefore, as mentioned in the qualitative data in thematic approach we can consider that the university should let the undergraduates to organize events, build up new challenges and bonds, aware about their psychological strength when dealing with them. The policy makers should hardly focus to change the system which will not affect a student who failed in mathematics has no future.

a. Future Research Directions

This study is inclusive with few of general limitation. First, the research is based on only two factors which affect academic performance of second undergraduates. There are also plenty of mediators in influencing when determining the academic performance from PsyCap. And also, lot fourth year undergraduates may face problems due to finals. Those can be done in future research studies. The study is also based only on study

stress not considering the symptoms of depression and areas like phobia in deeply. Though there are other private and state universities operate in Sri Lanka, some issues may occur relates to the generalizability of the study findings. Thus, the model needs further extension, and critical evaluation in terms of other educational institutions, schools, or other private universities in Sri Lanka to provide useful insights. Thirdly, this study has completed within a short period of time, comparatively this period of short time may not enough to get more accurate data or reliable data So, it is worth to spend more time in the area of the study.

Finally, the study was based on quantitative approach and qualitative approach and collected data based on a structured online questionnaire following survey as well as in in-depth interviews. Since this study mainly deals with positive emotions, psychological resources, attitudes, on favourable job behaviours at academic, and only on study stress structured questionnaire and few interviews may not fully capture them. Therefore, future research needs to more fully examine the nature of causation between PsyCap, Study Stress and academic performance as well the factors which may affects all undergraduates' academic performance.

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