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Understanding Patience-Related Academic Difficulties: An Exploratory Study of Generation Z Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The paper investigates the reasons behind why generation z undergraduate students of first semester are academically struggling with patience. The core objective of study is to explore the psychological and behavioral factors behind Patience and tolerance level. For this purpose, research considered 50 students of Psychology and took the structured questionnaires for them to respond. Also, the study used Self-determination theory (Vallerand, 2000) as a theoretical framework. As a result, the data revealed that some behavioral & psychological factors associated with patience such as attention sustainability, digital distractions, self-regulation etc. are causing students to struggle in academics. Moreover, the study recommends to incorporate classroom practices & instructional strategies that strengthen sustained attention, self-regulation, and patience in order to improve the academic performance of first-semester generation z students.

Keywords: Academic struggle, Generation Z, Patience, Undergraduate Students.

Introduction

Beginning of a higher education with challenging fields like Clinical Psychology is a critical phase of a student's life. These young people need a stronger attention, good responsibility, handling and deeper understanding when they are entering in their first semester because they are exposed to a completely new environment which is a major transition in their lives. This change is very difficult for most of the students to handle specially Generation Z students who were born during 1997 to 2012 because this generation grown up in a fast and rapidly changing world of internet and media where they got instantly, within few seconds, what they want. They lived in the era of technology and constant media communication where they don't have to wait for anything and don't have to keep patience (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The first semester students of university of management and technology often complain for less motivation, short attention span, procrastination, and faced difficulty in keeping concentration and focus. Many students exhausted due to submission of assignments and quizzes on times. These complains show a deeper concern for the academic performance of students especially for first semester students who are building their foundations of higher education (Muhammadamin & Abdalwahid, 2023).

Therefore, understanding and raising these concerns is very significant. These concerns are true and observational based. The students who just join university this year often complain for this. Some students encounter emotional and mental distress due to much work load, while some face intolerance in doing a big task that takes longer time to complete (Ragusa et al., 2023). The students are facing the behavioral problems like irregular study patterns, procrastination in completing a task, slow progress. Even the students who are enough intelligent and efficient often face the problems to stay motivated during studies and to stay patient and consistent. In complex tasks mostly students couldn't maintain long term engagement and this is more prevalent among university students (Delgado-García, García-Prieto, López-Aguilar, Ceinos-Sanz, & Open, 2025). There are some psychological factors which also influenced this struggle like problem in handling bigger tasks (coping), intolerance, low motivation, stress and some other behavioral issues like less competence and steadiness, habit of irregular studies with involvement of distractions, lack of ability to manage the time and stress (Nweke, Jarrar, Horoub, & Communications, 2024).

The research will mark this gap and study the research question: Why (factors may be behavioral or psychological) Generation Z undergraduate students are struggling academically in patience at UMT Lahore, Pakistan? The research objectives of this study are:

To identify the psychological factors, such as stress, emotional ups and downs, impatience, and concentration problems, which lead to academic struggles among first-semester Clinical Psychology students and to examine the behavioral factors such as procrastination of tasks, poor time management, avoidance behavior for studies, and irregular study habits, which influence a student's academic performance simultaneously and to understand how both psychological and behavioral factors work together to shape the academic experiences of Generation Z students during their first semester at university.

This study has importance for many reasons. Firstly, it focuses on a specific population, Generation Z Clinical Psychology students, whose academic performance is deeply influenced by their psychological conditions and behaviors. Secondly, understanding these struggles can help to identify the areas where students need support, whether it is about managing stress, developing healthy coping mechanisms or building better study habits and routines because stress and procrastination among students is closely linked with each other and this phenomenon is more common in private universities (KASSIM, HAZIDI, KASIM, IDRIS, & Humanities, 2025). Thirdly, the findings can help out universities in how to design guidance programs, counseling initiatives or academic workshops for first semester students. Fourthly, this research can open new doors in the academic context, especially in Pakistan, where only a limited studies have explored the link between psychological factors and academic struggles among psychology students. Lastly, by understanding the struggles early, students might be able to reinforce their stress coping mechanism and have better academic habits, leading to better long-term success in their respective career.

Although this research is very significant, it also has some limitations. The study is restricted to first semester Clinical Psychology students at UMT, which means the results may not be applied to students from other semesters, departments or universities. Also,

the study uses a subjective questionnaire, which depends on how honestly and accurately students talk about their own feelings and behaviors in this regard. Some students may hide or exaggerate their struggles due to fear of judgment or misunderstanding of the questions. Other researchers can conduct the same research with in the other universities and can take sample other than first semester students. They can also use objective questionnaires to get more defined results. Despite all these limitations, the study gives valuable insights which highlight the need for further research and practical steps in this regard.

Literature Review

At university level education, learning difficulties is a commonly discussed issue, especially among early undergraduate students who face high educational and performance related expectations. Studies from past show that university life exposes students to independent learning strategies, a sort of difficult course content, regular assessments, and high competition among peers, which results in mental exhaustion among many students. Which results in difficulties for many students in handling academic tasks. According to research, the academic difficulties which appear most commonly are poor academic performance, difficulty in understanding course material, lesser attention, and low interest in studies. Recent studies show that, students often complain about issues related to time management, academic burden, and exam related stress, which ultimately affect their learning outcomes Hameed, Jabeen, Hussain, and Sciences (2024). Students face all these challenges more prominently during their initial university phase when they are trying to adapt to new learning environment.

Moreover, academic struggles have a close link with mental fatigue and pressure ultimately resulting in emotional exhaustion. Many researchers have highlighted that continuous academic pressure can result in academic anxiety, discontentment, and sense of being less skillful among students(Bibi, Alvi, Noor, & Sciences, 2022). The psychological responses of students shown their weaknesses and this ultimately influence the academic performance of students. They couldn't concentrate properly on studies; the academic hurdles and the psychological issues go in direct ratio in a student's life. The more they face psychological issues the poorer performance they got in academics. The studies from current literature revealed that the academic performance depends upon the individual factors along with their cognitive ability. These factors include poor learning strategy, improper guidance by educational institutes and adjustment issues (Ijaz & Ishaq, 2024). The issue of academic struggles is multidimensional as it depends upon and linked with many factors. Therefore, there is a need to study academic performance struggle linked with the psychological and behavioral factors of students.

The generation that is born between 1990s to 2010s is generation z and mostly university students constitute this generation. The study took latest version of this generation in university as focus of study on first semester students. This generation who has witnessed a transition in the world and grew up in a fast world of internet, computer, smart phones and AI powered devices which make their lives easier and faster. This generation doesn't experience delays; they got more results by putting less efforts. This causes particular behavioral and psychological effects on this generation. This generation is different from

previous generation. The previous researches suggest that this generation involved more in short term tasks giving them instant rewards and use of visuals engage them more. On the other hand, the long lectures, deep and complex concepts learning, lengthy readings and delayed reward make them less involved and they feel difficulty to concentrate (Azmy et al., 2022). . As a result of this behavior their academic performance badly influenced. Furthermore, generation z students have much extended screen time, they have smart phones with them all the time even in classroom setting. The short videos or reels has become their addiction which gave them instant pleasure. But when their academic task is delayed or they got feedback after waiting some time, they start feeling discomfort and they face difficulty in managing this in their academic work (Alruthaya, Nguyen, & Lokuge, 2021). Also, the latest literature revealed that the excessive social media exposure increases many negative behaviors in students like comparisons, low self-esteem and low confidence which directly creates hurdles in their academic tasks and make their performance poor and lower their educational distinctions (Loveland, 2022).

Also, the beginning of first semester is very crucial in a student's life as it is a big transition from college life to university and it is a time to build strong basis in university Previous research has emphasized that first-semester students face significant challenges as they adjust to an unfamiliar educational setting, teaching style, and university requirements. This rapid change often requires students to develop self-directed study abilities, manage heavier study load, and adjust to new evaluation techniques. Several studies have reported that first-semester students frequently faced challenges related to organization of study time, educational stress and comprehending subject content.

The academic performance of undergraduate students is greatly influenced by the emotional and psychological factors. These factors cause less motivation, inability to concentrate, low learning outcomes and short attention span in many university students according to many studies. During the start of university these factors ultimately effected students overall academic performance and cause strain and stress in them. Stress is a condition induced due to adverse circumstances in a person and put mental and emotional pressure on him. It is a most common psychological problem seen in the university students. Researches revealed that it is induced by excessive academic load, high demands of study outcomes, repeated examinations and assessments. (Upadhyaya, Education, & technologies, 2021). This stress is impacting negatively the youth of our country especially to those who are making their basis in start of university. It is weakening the thinking ability of students, harming their retention, decreasing their ability to concentrate, thus effecting their cognition.

Another psychological problem that is commonly seen in university students is anxiety. It is defined as feeling anxious and worry in any distressful condition. It is proved by studies that anxiety cause problem in exam performance, academic presentations and participation in class activities (Kordzanganeh, Bakhtiarpour, Hafezi, & Dashtbozorgi, 2021). This may lead to negative behaviors in students like avoiding the classes, activities and even exams, low self-esteem, the fear of losing and ultimately results in poor performance overall in the classroom and exams. Another psychological factor that is linked with student's success is motivation. If a student experience low motivation, it will affect his performance as he felt low passion, low self-esteem and high procrastination

(Almulla, Alismail, & Daraghme, 2025). Therefore, it is important to understand these factors to understand the reasons behind the poor academic performance and to plan some strategies to overcome them.

Many researchers explained these phenomena but no one considered particularly the University of Management & Technology (UMT) Lahore and the initial semester students of this university because many researchers considered the global or national influential but not so specific for those who are facing a change from college to university in a difficult field like clinical psychology at UMT. Also, the previous studies explained the psychological; and behavioral impacts separately but not the combined impacts of both psychological and behavioral factors. This gap is important to examine. This will give a lot of insightful and valuable knowledge when research explores this gap and also led towards the techniques to cater them specific for the first semester students of clinical psychology at UMT.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study used a quantitative research design using a one-time survey method. This design was considered suitable as the study intended to explore academic patience and related psychological factors among first-semester clinical psychology students at a single point in time. A quantitative approach allowed the researchers to collect numerical data and identify trends related to students' academic struggles, attention, perseverance, and self-regulation. The cross-sectional nature of the study made it suitable for understanding students' current academic experiences during their initial semester at university.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Vallerand, 2000), which describes human drive in terms of independence, ability, and relatedness. This theory explained that when the fundamental psychological needs of a person are accomplished, he is more likely to remain passionate for studies and his motivation maintained. For the current research, this theory provided a basic structure and framework. It helped to understand the academic patience in students along with resilience and self-regulation. During a transition from college to university life sustaining patience, motivation and passion is important. If students are facing difficulty in this, it means their psychological needs like autonomy, resilience and competence are not sufficient.

Sample & Population

The population which is considered for study are students of University of Management & Technology and particularly the first semester students of Psychology discipline. The first semester students are considered because they are facing a transition from college to university life, making their basis for graduation, having the issues in adjustment, coping with the stress and burden of over workload of university especially in such challenging discipline of psychology. All these factors make this group appropriate for research on patience.

The research used a purposive sampling technique to select the participants. The total 50 students are selected with particular and specific characteristics. The first semester students are selected because they are new at university and having patience related issues more

and psychology students are selected because it is a challenging field and have more theoretical knowledge which required a constant focus with sustained patience.

Research Instrument

The study used a structured questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire developed to particular measure academic patience in students and also psychological factors linked with it. There are six main factors in the questionnaire to measure academic patience. These factors are attention endurance, frustration tolerance, digital distraction, metacognitive self-regulation academic delay of gratification, and academic perseverance. Each factor consists of five questions to collect quantitate data for analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected for study through the questionnaire. The first semester students of psychology selected and responses were taken from them through online distribution of questionnaire. The researcher took consent of participation from the participants first and then gave them instructions and insured them that their responses would be anonyms and confidentiality would be maintained. This assured ethical considerations in research.

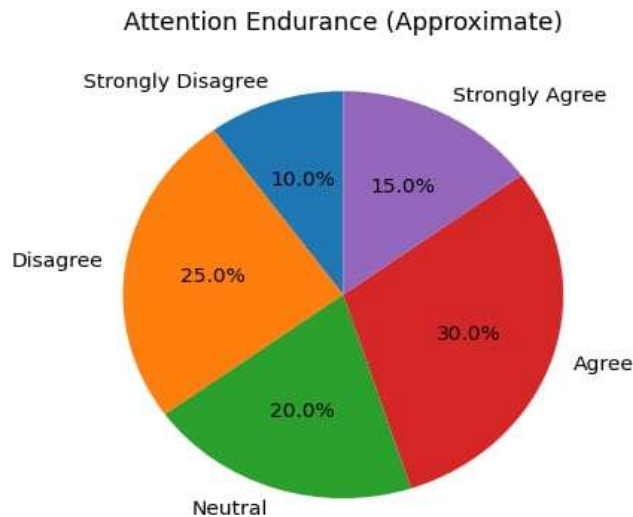
Data Analysis

The data was collected using the structured questionnaires in the form of google forms and distributed in students via online link. Data is analyzed subjectively by collected responses on the responses section of google forms. Each part has its own explanation that is drawn on the bases of responses of questions under each heading. There is total six heading which are actually the factors which influenced academic patience of students. The detailed discussion on each factor is given below;

Attention Endurance

The results related to attention show that a large number of students face difficulty in focusing on academic tasks. A large number of students complained about losing focus quickly while studying and feeling mentally tired during long study hours and lectures. This shows that constant focus, which is important for university level studies, is weak among these students. University holds the kind of environment where students have to work for long hours sometimes. Disturbed focus can lessen their ability to understand academic content, especially in critical subjects such as Clinical Psychology, where critical thinking and deep analysis is required.

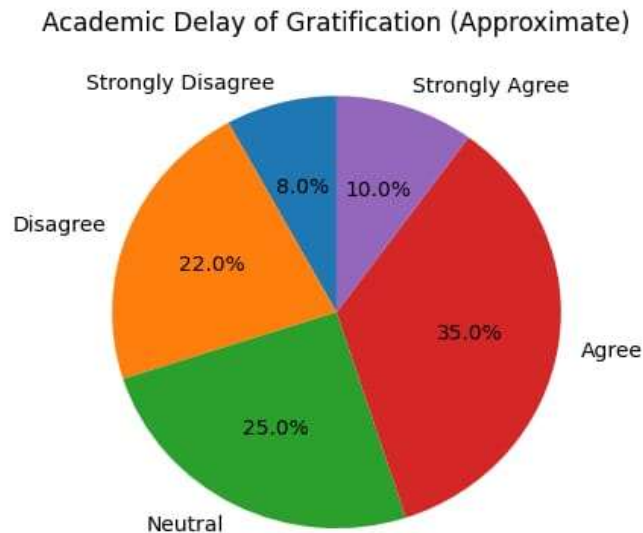
Moreover, repeated task shifting is also reported by students during their study hours. Students often shifted between tasks, checking messages or notes and online resources even when constant attention was required for better performance. These factors show reduced attention span, which can negatively affect ability to understand, retain information, and overall academic efficiency during long academic tasks. If we see it from behavioral perspective, it is difficult for Gen Z students to focus for extensive time period as they are used to fast technology services and multi-tasking, which is total opposite of the concentrated learning required for academic success at the university level. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;



Academic delay of gratification

According to the responses, a number of students lose their patience when they are doing something difficult and long-term that require consistent effort and reward of the task is delayed. The large number of students feel frustrated during this and they preferred the tasks which gave them immediate and quick reward. Many students in the responses agreed that they find it so difficult to wait for the feedback from professor or the grades uploaded late by professors. This data aligns with the behavior of generation z students. This generation who grew up in fast world, got instantly what they want. For this generation waiting for something is a biggest task even it gave them long term benefit. This behavior is a major hurdle in success for this generation as they struggle in tasks and assignments that required long term efforts but the reward is delayed.

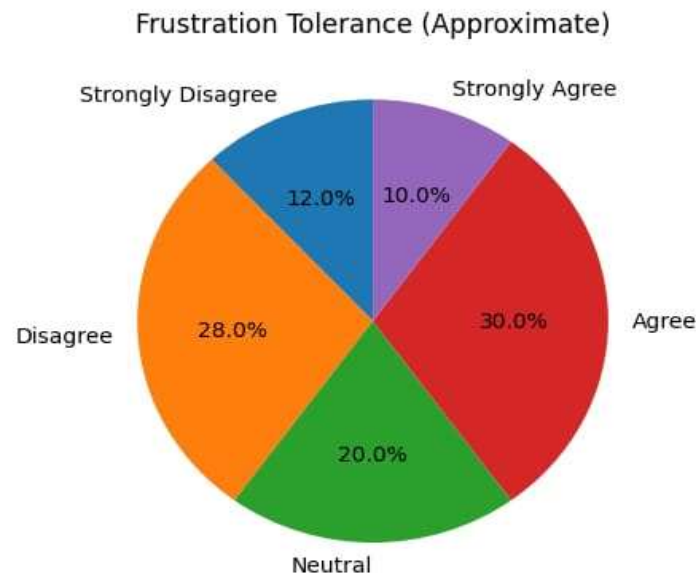
Moreover, the responses also indicated that the students feel less motivated when they could not complete a task quickly. They wanted to complete a task or assignment quickly to get their reward in the form of result immediately. If the task takes more time, they feel drained and gave up efforts on that task. In context of psychology students, they have to study large magnitudes of case studies and deep theories which didn't give them immediate results rather they are important in clinical practice and gave students long term benefits. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;



Frustration Tolerance

According to responses many students got frustrated when they are exposed to something difficult or long. When a topic is difficult to understand or teacher gave a difficult assignment which required consistent attention, the students got frustrated. The first semester students who are new at university and having adjustment issues when they got some difficult tasks they got frustrated easily. In the context of psychology students who have long theories and complex concepts students face difficulty in understanding and learning which make it difficult to tolerate the frustration. This increased frustration causes many problems like stress and anxiety in the students and ultimately results in poor performance in academics and hurdle in coping with the problems related with their studies.

Furthermore, the studies revealed that such low frustration tolerance may causes emotional related issues in students. The stress, anxiety and escaping behavior caused lack of competence and resilience in students and effect their academic performance. According to studies the students who have high level of frustration tolerance have poor academic performance and have fewer academic distinctions. For better coping, the results suggests that students can adopt strategies to make their frustration tolerance better and teaching methods can also be improved. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;

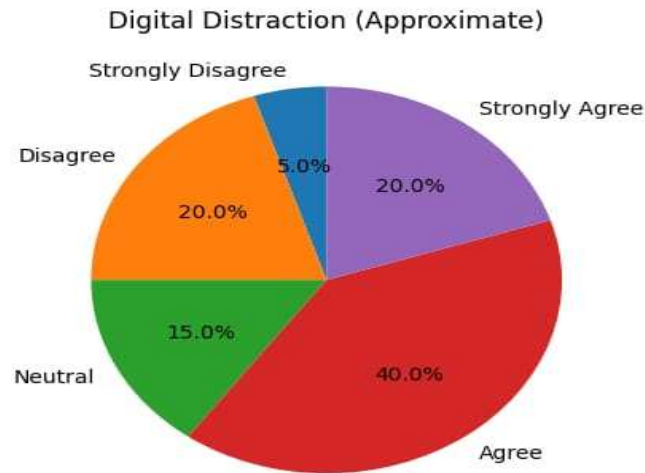


Digital distractions

The results indicated that digital distractions such as social media use especially mobile phone use is the most effective factor present in students and causing low patience in students and effecting their learning and academic performance. Many students often used digital devices while studying and keep on checking their mobile phones while learning something. This proves the interference of digital devices in learning something and in lowering a student's patience. and these behaviors are frequent in all students of Generation Z because they have experienced a complete different and fast world of internet and digital devices. These types of distractions effect their attention span and their ability to stay focused. Students can't sit for studies without bothering from these distractions. These also harm their retention and learning and ultimately results in poor academic performance.

Also, the digital devices have become a necessary part of student's life. The activities without any digital interaction seems boring to them rather than any activity that involve social media use or gaming. Mobile phone has become their life; they can't imagine their life without them.

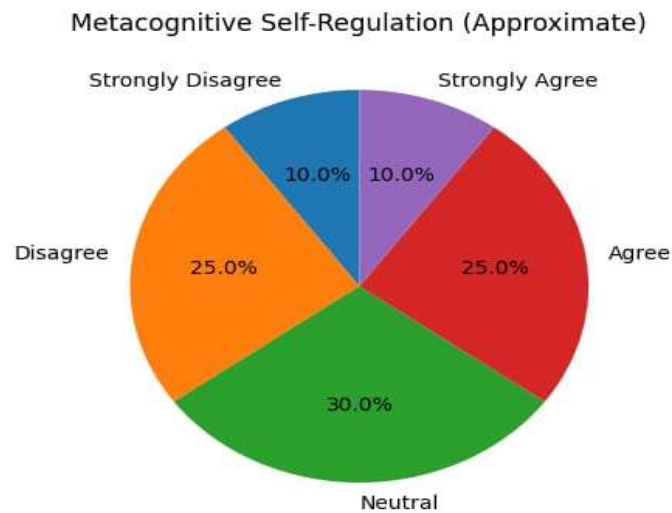
Even receiving no notification, they kept on checking their phones. Any learning task that requires high attention and focus is affected due to this deficiency of focus and students faced difficulty in keeping patience and keeping their attention on task. In such situations they need a structured study schedule to maintain their patience while doing any academic task or while learning important concepts. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;



Metacognition Self- Regulation

A significant ratio of students in the results have less metacognition and self-regulation. Mosly students find it difficult to manage study hours and mobile phone use. They struggled in managing and following a structured schedule. They are not even aware of their academic performance progress. Metacognition self-regulation is an ability of a student to manage a proper schedule and evaluating once academic progress. If this ability is less in some student, he will struggle in following timetable, managing his learning, evaluating his progress through self-reflection. They lack adaptability, punctuality, time management, planning and self-awareness which is significant for students especially for those in a demanding field like psychology. This ultimately results in low academic patience and poor performance.

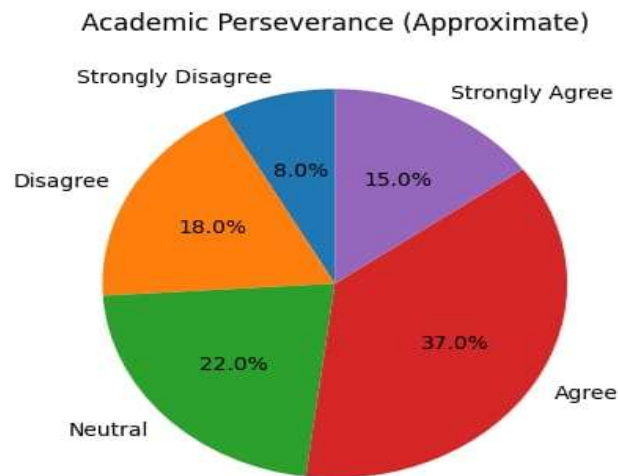
Furthermore, many students responded that they find it difficult to adjust when learning some complex with the learning strategy which is not so efficient. This showed student's lack of adaptability, learning mismanagement and weakness of metacognition and self-regulation. As a result, their patience decreased and anxiety increased. Many studies proved that by managing the learning methods and adapting the new strategies to improve a smooth flow and by increasing both external and internal motivation, students can overcome these problems. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;



Academic perseverance

According to responses, many students of psychology have reported that they experience low motivation during a long-term task which required attention for a long time and rewards are given in the end. This showed less perseverance and steadfastness in academics which is significant for a student's success and survival. The high persistence and perseverance of students helped them in maintaining focus and motivation during a difficult task and under high pressure. Mostly academic tasks required persistence efforts to complete. If they are exposed to such tasks, they gave up easily and quickly due to less resilience. Their attention diverted more easily during such tasks and they couldn't complete it properly and on time.

The less perseverance and resilience led to low motivation and low patience level in students of first semester and stops their academic growth which is important for them as they are facing a transition and building their basis of university life. Students can overcome this situation by adopting the coping strategies to improve their persistence and resilience to better adapt the university life and doing academic tasks more effectively and in more persistence way without losing attention. The visual representation of results in the form of pie chart is given below;



Findings & Discussions

The study reveals that many students of first semester faced the problem of focusing and maintaining attention during a task. It is relevant to generation z because this generation experienced a fast world, high internet usage which develop their habit of constant multitasking and irregular learning activities. The students who experienced more usage of smart phone and internet may face more difficulty in sustainability of attention and focus. These students could not maintain their attention on their long lectures of university or any long-term task. This result in their low attention span and they faced problem in retrieval of information and learning academic task. During academic tasks maintaining attention is very critical, especially in psychology where understanding and garbing a concept require a proper directional and constant effort. The past studies also support this concept that students who have low attention span have poor academic performance due to low patience in study tasks (Asif, Kazi, & Research, 2024). The result of present studies also reinforces this concept.

Academic delay of gratification means a student is getting academic reward in delayed time and not instantly. This creates a kind of impatience in students, because the coming generation specially generation z wants quiz reward like social media scrolling give them instant dopamine boosting and they keep on scrolling. This generation can't wait for a reward in academic tasks and can't put persistent and long-term effort to get reward in the end. This also cause procrastination in students and these students with lower academic patience do their academic tasks with lower energy and patience. Mostly academic tasks want a persistent and constant effort which is so difficult for this generation. The past studies also explain these phenomena that generation z is a generation who wants quick reward (Bembenuitty, 2009) and present result also support this concept that mostly students find it difficult to do a long-term task with the reward in the end.

Many students find it difficult to handle and bear the stress and pressure of academic tasks according to results. This means that a students have insufficient capability to manage the pressure of academic tasks, challenging assignments, high workload and stress of maintaining the grades and performance. This low tolerance and capability to handle the

frustration may lead to low motivation, low passion, emotional strain and withdrawal behavior in the students. This causes poor academic performance in the students. Specially the students of psychology who have to learn their complex concepts, they need to have a high level of stress coping ability but due to this fast world they are lacking this type of tolerance. Previous studies explain how important frustration tolerance ability is in a student's life (Ruiz-Ortega & Berrios-Martos, 2025). The present results also refer student lacking in managing pressure and frustration which is a major concern.

The results reveal that the student's performance is greatly influenced by use of mobile phone and social media. This reduced attention span of a student and interfere in his daily academic tasks effecting his overall academic performance. Many students in the results have high exposure of social media, even use mobile phone during lectures and their focus is more towards these devices and it has become a major distraction. This is even more common in generation z context who remain connected with social media and digital devices all the time and have an addiction of scrolling reels. The students often do multitask like studying with music in their ears and have very less time of study and more time on mobile phone. They have high screen time. The past studies also raised this concern (Ann, 2025). Therefore, this problem needs to be solved and students need a proper structured schedule for studying.

Metacognition is an ability of a student to evaluate his own performance and to maintain a balance and managing the time, tracking their success, accessing their own performance and learning strategies. The results shown that there is a low level of metacognition self-regulation in students which effected their performance in academics. The first semester students who are new in university life and are making their base. These students are unfamiliar with the university life; therefore, they lack this ability. These students need a proper guidance to maintain this ability in them. The past studies also explain that metacognition self-regulation is a significant trait that is very crucial for students' success in academics (Wang, Zhang, Huang, & Zhang, 2025).

Academic preference means staying consistent and steadfast during an academic task. According to the results, many students lack this perseverance. Students can't put constant efforts on a long-term task. They wanted to a short task with very less effort. These students stop putting efforts, if they experienced any complications during any tasks, they stop the efforts and lose hope. They faced insufficient determination, emotion strain and inadequate coping skills. This is much more common in students of first semester who have insufficient ability to handle a difficult task specially in the students of psychology which is already a demanding field. The previous studies also explain this phenomenon (Bazelaïs et al., 2018), and the current results also support this that in this generation students stop putting efforts if they find a task difficult.

Conclusion

The study aims to investigate academic struggle related with patience for Generation Z undergraduate students of first semester psychology in UMT Lahore. For this purpose, some main factors such as attention endurance, academic delay of gratification, digital distraction, metacognition, frustration tolerance and academic perseverance are examined and explored through questionnaires. The results have shown an explanatory and comprehensive knowledge about it. The challenges are influenced by the factors of

behavior and cognition which ultimately influenced their academic patience and performance according to the findings. The research question is addressed in the results clearly that academic struggle of patience in the students of first semester is due to less attention span, low motivation, less resilience and irregular emotional responses.

These results show that the academic struggle is due to the behavioral and psychological factors along with the intellectual factors. The overall studies contribute to valuable insights and understanding of academic struggle of patience among students. By identifying factors, the studies help and led in developing the psychological and behavioral strategies to overcome this struggle. The professionals can recognize and explore the factors through this research, develop strategies for the students who are entering university and making their academic basis which assist them to adjust in new academic environment in a better way.

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