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Editorial Note

South Asian Journal of Management Research (SAJMR), is a scholarly journal that publishes scientific research on the theory and practice of management. All management, computer science, environmental science related issues relating to strategy, entrepreneurship, innovation, technology, and organizations are covered by the journal, along with all business-related functional areas like accounting, finance, information systems, marketing, and operations. The research presented in these articles contributes to our understanding of critical issues and offers valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Authors are invited to publish novel, original, empirical, and high quality research work pertaining to the recent developments & practices in all areas and disciplined.

Cross-functional, multidisciplinary research that reflects the diversity of the management science professions is also encouraged, the articles are generally based on the core disciplines of computer science, economics, environmental science, mathematics, psychology, sociology, and statistics. The journal's focus includes managerial issues in a variety of organizational contexts, including for profit and nonprofit businesses, organizations from the public and private sectors, and formal and informal networks of people. Theoretical, experimental (in the field or the lab), and empirical contributions are all welcome. The journal will continue to disseminate knowledge and publish high-quality research so that we may all benefit from it.

Dr. Pooja M. Patil
Editor

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South Asian Journal of Management Research
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C O N T E N T S

Analysing How Sociocultural Factors Impact Students' Academic Performance through Mediating Effects of Stress, Alcohol and Tobacco Use: The Use of Social Cognitive Theory

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Abstract

This conceptual paper delves into a pressing issue amid Global Society. It explores an urgent issue in today's higher education systems, learners are turning more and more to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes, to deal with academic stress. The university system has been paying more attention to sustainability and social responsibility in recent years (Azzali and Sabiur, 2018; Ojala, 2017; Ramos et al.,2015; Lozano et al., 2015). The continuous usage of alcohol and tobacco has been adopted by tertiary learners as a maladaptive strategy towards stress in academic life (Paul et al., 2024). This study proposes a conceptual model assessing the inter-relationships between pertinent sociocultural aspects, stress, alcohol, and tobacco use on the academic performance of tertiary learners. In view to provide a comprehensive understanding, this paper leverages on the Social Cognitive Theory to explore the interconnectedness between environmental, personal, and behavioural factors to explain the behaviour of the learners in a holistic approach. Through the mediating effects of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use, this study offers a conceptual model that investigates how sociocultural factors specifically, peer rejection, family economic status, and environmental influences, indirectly affect academic performance. The study adds on to the existing literature by identifying key antecedents towards the academic performance of university students. A pilot test and a comprehensive survey of public and private tertiary institutions in Mauritius will be part of the quantitative method that will be employed. Validation of the conceptual model will be done using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings of this research are meant to shape the creation of comprehensive, empirically supported programs that promote students' well-being and academic achievement. With an emphasis on how behavioural, personal, and environmental factors interact to shape academic achievements, the mod***el*** aims to support the development of sustainable teaching methods in higher education.

Keywords: Global Society, Tertiary Education, Social Cognitive Theory, Sociocultural Factors, Academic Performance

Introduction

Tertiary education is essential for developing skilled human capital that helps communities address their actual issues (Idris, 2012). A strong force for change, education enhances livelihoods and health while promoting social stability. At the micro level, social stability is closely associated with improved living standards, as higher levels of education equip individuals with greater social and economic opportunities, ultimately driving increased productivity. At a broader level, education plays a pivotal role in shaping skilled and competent human capital, serving as a catalyst for economic growth and exerting a positive influence on overall economic development (Sothan, 2019). The education path is a long and difficult journey in academic life and although not an easy process, it captures values, learning abilities, skills and behaviours. Henceforth, students must graduate with a strong academic record by dedicating adequate study time to achieve academic success.

A plethora of research in education and psychology has been recently undertaken to understand the myriad elements influencing learners' academic performance (Kocsis & Molnar, 2024; Zheng *et al.,* 2024; Hogberg, 2024). In this contemporary society, learners are paving towards elevated academic pressure due to the intricate evolution of the environment (Quach *et al.,* 2015; Blake & Mills, 2014). Previous studies posited that different factors, namely personality, cognition, peer bonding, family background, school climate, social and cultural affect students' academic performance (Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013; Castro-Sanchez *et al.,* 2019). According to Liem (2019), sociocultural conditions are the salient elements impacting students' academic performance. Zheng *et al.,* (2024), portrayed the noteworthiness of taking into consideration sociocultural factors of learners to understand the individual aspects that can influence academic performance.

Although empirical studies have delved into various sociocultural factors influencing learners' academic performance, limited empirical evidence points towards variables such as peer rejection, family economic status,

and environmental influences through the mediating role of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use to determine the different inter-relationships towards academic performance of tertiary level students, using the Social Cognitive Theory. Fite *et al.* (2014) revealed through a study conducted in the USA that peer rejection as a social context adversely correlated to a learner's academic performance. Additionally, research conducted in countries like Uganda, Nigeria & Ghana postulated that family socioeconomic status is a vital construct in students' low academic performance (Etsey, 2005; Kyoshaba, 2009; Obeta, 2014). Many theoretical frameworks portray the environmental influences on student learning, such as Behaviour theories (Skinner, 1965), Constructivist theories (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978), and Bronfenbrenner (1979), the theories highlight the appropriate environmental conditions to enhance learning, which includes cultural values, societal norms, media, family and school amongst others.

The determinants of academic stress and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco in the milieu of education and academic performance have been largely explored. Studies posited that there is an elevated level of stress in tertiary education (Pacheco *et al.,* 2023), which is not only negatively impacting learners' academic performance (Frazier *et al.,* 2019), but results in substance use (Boulton O'Connell, 2017)**,** insomnia (Amaral *et al.,* 2018), anxiety and depressive disorders (Rosiek *et al.,* 2016), leading to worsening academic strain (Chapell *et al.,* 2005; Hysenbegasi *et al .,* 2005). Furthermore, the use of alcohol and tobacco at universities and their effects on academic performance have been researched. For instance in Nigeria, alcohol and tobacco use among youngsters ranging from 10 to 24 years are suffering from mental illnesses and consequently causing 2% of the mortality around the world (Ajayi & Somefu, 2020). The Social Cognitive Theory is an exhaustive framework evolved by Albert Bandura for understanding how human beings learn certain behaviours through social interaction, imitation, and observation (Bandura *et al.,* 1986). According to Social Cognitive Theory, human functioning is the outcome of three sets of influences including personal, behavioural, and environmental factors (Bandura, 2001). The theory has been extensively used in several studies related to education, academic performance, academic engagement, and well-being (Collie & Martin, 2024; Labrague, 2024; Francis *et al.,* 2024).

Social Cognitive Theory is used to understand how sociocultural factors: Peer Rejection, Family Economic Status, and Environmental Influences through the mediating role of Stress, Alcohol, and Tobacco use, impact on tertiary student's Academic Performance. This paper provides a multifaceted grasp of multiplex dynamics concealing academic performance at the tertiary level. By emphasising the mediating role of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use, this paper urges the need for wholesome and evidence-based interventions to tackle issues pertaining to academic performance and learned behaviours. The insights into the interconnectedness between the sociocultural factors and the moderators will enhance academic success, students' well-being, and educational practices.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Academic Performance

As a main significant concept, academic performance has been widely examined in educational research (Tang, Zhang & Cui, 2024). It serves as an indicator to measure the success and effectiveness in student achievement towards their goals and proficiencies (Engin-Demir 2009; Adeniyi *et al*., (2024). Masnan *et al*., (2025) points out that academic performance is determined by both cognitive and non-cognitive factors. Empirical evidence extends various factors that determine academic performance with antecedents such as undergraduate stress (Oyewobi *et al*., 2021), social relationships (Li *et al.,* 2021), academic engagement (Casanova *et al.,* 2024) amongst others. Thus, growing the literature on academic performance is of essence to further understand the challenges students encounter, particularly in the context of higher education.

Alcohol and Tobacco Use

The influence of substance use on academic performance among students in higher education has been vastly explored in research (Whatnall *et al.,* 2024; Terrell *et al.,* 2024; Gordon & Ohannessian, 2024). Adolescents and young adults, given their age, are more prone to risk-taking behaviour and tend to follow their friends. Studies revealed peer relationship as an instigating antecedent for alcohol and tobacco consumption (Yahya *et al.,* 2010; Elegbede *et al.*, 2012; Arute *et al.,*2015; Itanyi *et al.*, 2020; Adesina *et al.,* 2020). Findings from research showed that youngsters were encouraged to drink and smoke by their peers (Yahya *et al.,* 2010; Itanyi *et al.,* 2020; Adesina *et al.,* 2020). Moreover, studies have revealed that students in higher education adopted alcohol and tobacco use as a maladaptive coping strategy to handle external pressures such as time management and academic stress (Metzger *et al.,* 2017; Ou *et al.,* 2024; Terrell *et al.,* 2024). Previous studies found that alcohol and tobacco use can negatively contribute to poor concentration, low cognitive functions, and academic performance (Paul *et al.,* 2024; Maraqa *et al.,* 2024; de Goede *et al.,* 2021). However, it is noted that some studies consider alcohol and tobacco use together as one antecedent while others have explored them separately. This study will therefore use alcohol and tobacco as two distinct variables as a moderator vis a vis stress to understand its effect on academic performance.

Stress

The integral aspects of being a university student is dealing with stress which impairs one's abilities to perform academically (Whitman *et al.,* 1985). Stress is conceptualised as physiological and psychological responses to stressors which can be internal or external in nature and influences behaviour (VandenBos, 2015). University environment can bring both eustress (positive stress) and distress (negative stress) to students (Bush *et al.,* 1985; Brown & Ralph, 1999). As pointed out in the literature stress shares a complex relationship with learning (Sapolsky, 2015; Gellisch, 2024). This can be explained through the impairment of cognitive processors which results in students' inability to think critically (Sandi, 2013). Several factors such as meeting people from different backgrounds, transitioning to a new academic journey can be stressful for students (Iqra, 2024). Additionally, stress is known to cause psychiatric issues and dependency to substance use (Guidi *et al.,* 2020). Thus, there is a need to broaden understanding on the antecedents and consequences of stress within the education sector.

Sociocultural Factors

Sociocultural describes a broad range of cultural and societal factors that affect attitudes, behaviours, and, eventually, health outcomes. These factors influence an individual's relationships, actions, principles, feelings and beliefs. Examples of sociocultural factors include social class, religious beliefs, income distribution, language, business practices, social values, consumer preferences, social organization, and attitudes toward work. Prior research has extensively delved into the influence of social factors on academic performance, and academic achievement (Qureshi *et al.,* 2023; Teng *et al.,*2022; Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

Empirical evidence shows a growing interest in the diversity of sociocultural factors such as neighborhood violence, family economic status, religious differences, peer rejection, and environmental influences, amongst others that contribute to poor academic success and academic performance in tertiary education (Lorijn *et al.,* 2022; Xiao *et al.,* 2021; Burgos-Calvillo *et al.,* 2024). This study emphasises peer rejection, family economic status, and environmental factors mitigating academic performance through the mediating effects of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use.

Peer Rejection

Peer rejection refers to the various ways that children exclude and harm each other, ranging from overt forms of control and exclusion to more covert strategies like gossiping and rumors (Carey *et al.,* 2009). Lin *et al.,* 2024, revealed a correlation between the role of peers, risky behaviours, and poor academic success. According to Prinstein and Giletta (2020), friendship quality, peer acceptance, rejection, and victimisation are significant components of peer functioning. Previous studies point out rejection and peer victimisation as determinants that negatively influence academic performance in higher education (Espelage *et al.,* 2013; Lorijn *et al.,* 2022). Henceforth, it becomes vital to contemplate peer rejection as a sociocultural factor to explore the dynamics of academic performance among tertiary students.

Family Economic Status

Family Economic Status has been well-documented in past research, specifically portraying its effect on educational success (Boggess, 1998; Garg *et al.,* 2007; Rumberger *et al.,* 2008; Polidano *et al.,* 2012). Adesina *et al.,* (2020) and Itanyi *et al.,* (2020), pointed out a higher number of alcohol and tobacco use by students whose parents have a low economic status. Researchers emphasised that students from affluent backgrounds typically attain better academic results. This can be explained by the fact that students from high socio-economic status homes or schools have more access to activities and resources for learning foreign languages, as well as to good parenting techniques and a more welcoming environment (Liu, *et al.,* 2020). Family economic status forms part of the social learning theory's social aspect. Therefore, this study has opted for family economic status as a dependent variable, using the Social Cognitive Theory to understand its impact on academic performance.

Environmental Influences

The different environmental factors that influence the academic performance of learners include peer support, social support, institutional support, university services, and appropriate workload (Tao *et al.,* 2000; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Sharp & Theiler, 2018; Chang *et al.,* 2021). Empirical evidence has demonstrated that by fulfilling students' fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the learning environment enhances their well-being (Kiltz *et al.,* 2024). According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), the perspective on student functioning, environmental and personal influences play a crucial role in how students behave. Social cognitive theorists stated that student engagement might determine their conduct (Bandura, 1997; Christenson *et al.,* 2008). Environmental influences are adopted as a construct, using the Social Cognitive Theory to mitigate its influence on the academic performance of tertiary learners.

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura first proposed the Social Cognitive Theory in the year 1989. It emphasises how behavioural, personal, and environmental factors (as demonstrated in Figure 1) interact and interrelate to shape behaviour. According to this theory, a variety of elements, including personal beliefs, motivation, self-efficacy, behavioural outcomes, and the social and physical environment, influence behaviour (Nwosu *et al.,* 2022). This theory has been greatly used and explored various interactions in a wide range of fields, particularly, the education sector. Prior research indicated the necessity of creating and adjusting internal and external factors associated with innovative behaviour (Sahin, Gulacar & Stuessy, 2015; Stone & Baker-Eveleth, 2013; Zobair *et al.,* 2021). Prior research has examined social influences and enabling conditions as environmental factors (Wu *et al.,* 2022). Social Cognitive Theory portrayed how individuals explore behavioural patterns further to interplay their environment, personal characteristics and cognitive processes (Middleton, Hall & Raeside, 2019). When applying Social Cognitive Theory to health issues, three interacting components are involved namely, behavioural, socio-environmental, and personal cognitive factors. Personal cognitive factors comprise other dimensions such as self-efficacy, expectations of outcomes and knowledge.

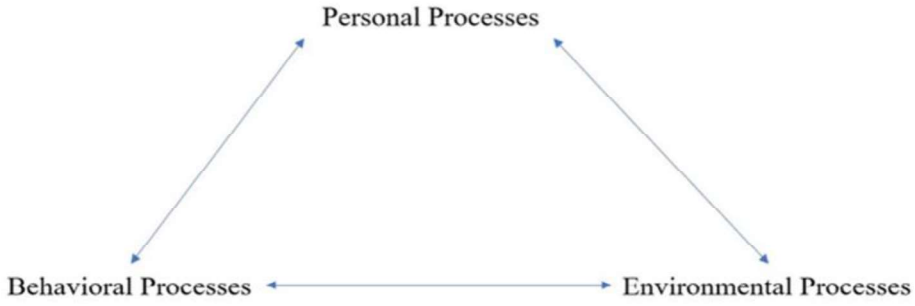

Figure 1: Model of Reciprocal Interactions in Social Cognitive Theory

Source: Adapted from Schunk & DiBenedetto (2020)

Personal factors in Social Cognitive Theory

Being one of the determinants in Social Cognitive Theory, personal factors refer to the confidence that individuals show when engaged in activities (Strachan *et al.,* 2017). One of the main components of personal factors is self-efficacy which reflects the amount of control that an individual has when exposed to any given situation (Hagger *et al.,* 2020). Sport, education, career and occupational development, and mental and physical health settings are just a few of the fields and contexts where the essence of Social Cognitive Theory has been used as a framework for behaviour modification (Li *et al.,*2024). Nine researchers studied self-efficacy beliefs across different behavioural functioning domains such as work-related performance, academic performance, sports performance, psychosocial functioning, and health functioning as cited by Bandura and Locke (2003). Self-efficacy was proven to be a powerful predictor of performance level, persistence in the face of challenging issues, and the occurrence of coping behaviour. Numerous studies have demonstrated a high correlation between drinking/drug use outcomes after a range of treatments and self-efficacy beliefs in connection to substance use disorders (Kadden & Litt, 2011). People with the necessary skills and high levels of coping efficacy are more likely to put in the work necessary to successfully avoid high-risk settings for drug or alcohol use (Bandura, 1986). Several studies have shown that self-efficacy predicts treatment outcomes and acts as a significant predictor of alcohol consumption (Maisto, Connors & Zywiak, 2000; Sitharthan & Kavanagh, 1991; Kavanagh, Sitharthan & Sayer, 1996).

Behavioral Factors

According to Bandura (2004), when it comes to changing behaviour, short-term and achievable goals work best. This construct represents the strategies a person formulates to execute the behaviour at a later time. According to Ramirez, Kulinna, and Cothran (2012), behavioural factors also affect changes in healthy behaviour practices. The amount of research that has used Social Cognitive Theory to comprehend and explore the factors influencing behaviour, specifically, physical exercise has been enormous over the last forty years (Beauchamp, Jackson, & Morton , 2012; Feltz *et al .,*2008). The behaviour of human beings are based on social cues from previously learnt behaviour that observers are capable of performing but have not done so due to a lack of inducements rather than constraints (Bandura, 2009). Teachers have fostered the growth of creative thinking in their students by demonstrating their own creativity, offering chances for creative expression, and sending social cues about the value and acceptance of creativity in the classroom (Rubenstein *et al.*, 2018). Henceforth, one premise of Social Cognitive Theory is that individuals adopt new behaviours by observing how other people behave and their resulting actions. Individuals are more likely to simulate a behaviour if a reward is associated. In an experiment

conducted by Bandura and Walters (1963), children imitated the aggressive behaviour of the model who received praise for acting in an aggressive manner towards a Bobo doll.

Environmental Factors

According to Abedini *et al.,* (2024), environmental factors are made up of two significant environmental determinants: the social effect that community members have on one another and the sense of shared community. The term "social impact" describes how a person's thoughts and behaviours are mirrored in the actions of others (Latane & Nida, 1980). Social support and barriers to the adoption of a specific behaviour are examples of environmental factors. The underlying concept of social support under the lens of environmental factors is the extent to which others assist in promoting and influencing an individual's participation in particular behaviour (Ramirez, Kulinna & Cothran, 2012). The authors also found that teachers work in both the microenvironment and macroenvironment, which includes legislative regulations, administration goals, and evaluation practices. Therefore, teachers' evaluations of their capacity to foster creativity may be influenced by a variety of elements in each of these contexts, such as environmental distractions or limitations and particular, group support systems. Findings of numerous studies have demonstrated a correlation between treatment outcome and both substance use-related variables (Adamson, Sellman & Frampton, 2009; Wittiewitz, 2011) and demographic variables (Adamson, Sellman & Frampton, 2009; Sharma *et al.,* 2012; McKay *et al.*, 2013; Smit *et al.,* 2014; Walton *et al.,* 2003). Thus, it is imperative to showcase the importance of environmental factors in this paper.

Research Method

This study will employ a quantitative methodology. Data will be collected through the use of a questionnaire which will be distributed to learners in various public and private tertiary institutions in Mauritius. A pilot test of 50 questionnaires would be used to ensure if there is any need for adequate adjustment before the final data collection. Once validated, 400 questionnaires would then be distributed to students following diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate studies at tertiary level. Upon completion of data collection, the same will be coded using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be also used to confirm the proposed model. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis and SEM will be employed to evaluate the model taking into consideration reliability and validity.

Conceptual Framework and Research Hypothesis

The proposed conceptual model portrays the inter-relationships between sociocultural factors (peer rejection, family economic and environmental influences), stress, alcohol and tobacco use as moderators, and academic performance. In the view of change and restructuring, academic achievement and academic performance are key components for higher education institutions. Academic performance is commonly well-documented in the education sector as its outcome determines the learner's overall achievement. As such, attention is paid to whether students' sociocultural factors lead to stress, alcohol, and tobacco use among students. This model in Figure 2 assesses antecedents such as learner's Peer Rejection, Family Economic Status and Environmental Influences, and Stress and student's Use of Alcohol and Tobacco as moderators towards students' Academic Performance.

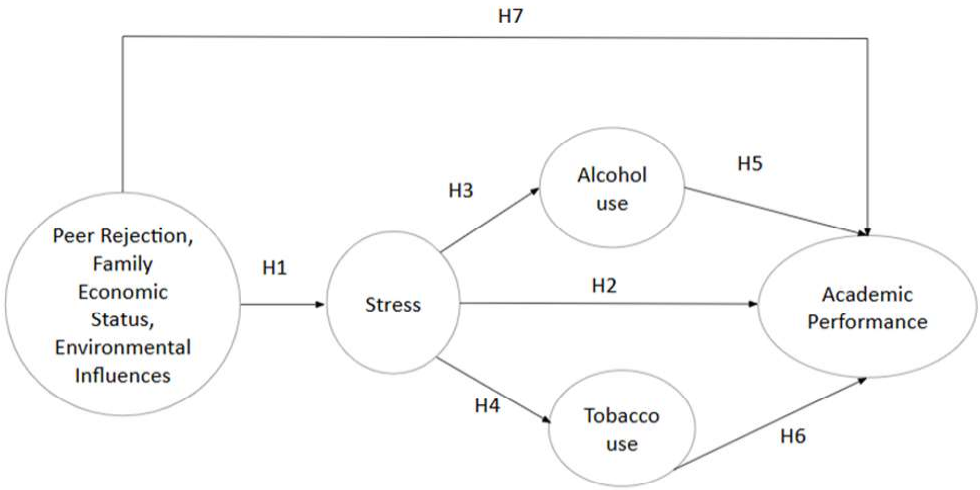

Figure 2: represents the conceptual model
Source: Sobha, Ladsawut & Kodye (2024)

Several factors impacting academic performance were explored in the prior studies (Kocsis & Molnar, 2024; Zheng *et al.,* 2024; Hogberg, 2024), yet limited studies tested the relationship between pertinent determinants of sociocultural factors such as peer rejection, family economic status and environmental influences affecting the academic performance of students. Furthermore, stress and alcohol and tobacco use are regarded as moderators that may impair academic performance by influencing cognitive function, self-regulation, and focus (Paul *et al.,* 2024; Maraqa *et al.,* 2024; de Goede *et al.,* 2021). This paradigm provides insights for educational interventions by analysing the combined effects of these components and moderating influences on academic performance. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a Peer Rejection positively influences on Stress

Peer rejection can lead to various forms of stress. Most individuals respond unfavourably, often evade and react to the experience of rejection (Hudd & Moscovitch, 2020). This can be in the form of exclusion or isolation that one can face in society (Coplan & Bowker, 2013). The lack of social skills results in peer rejection (McGuigan *et al.,* 2018), which surfaces as stressors (Zhang & Ngai, 2024). Theoretically, this relationship is supported by the Social Cognitive Theory which explains changes in the emotional aspect of an individual due to peer entry and provocation situations (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). The Social Cognitive Theory supports that social interactions create learning opportunities and these can be in the form of rewards or punishments (Bandura & Walters 1963). In this line, peer rejection among university students is a form of punishment which engages in stressing behaviours. As pointed out by Iqbal *et al.,* (2016), peer acceptance results in good self-image which increases social abilities and academic performance. However, if students have poor social skills, they tend to be rejected by peers which impedes their academic performance (Welsh *et al.,* 2001). Peer rejection as a form of social exclusion among university students leads to stressful situations like anxiety, sadness and depression (Niu *et al.,* 2023; Bungert *et al.,* 2015). Thus, as per Iqbal *et al.,* (2016), there is empirical evidence that there is a positive relationship between peer rejections and stress in learners.

H1b Family Economic Status positively affects Stress

Educational equity is often compromised by socioeconomic stratification, which influences access to resources and academic outcomes (Ramburuth & Hartel, 2010). Research highlights that family economic status is a key determinant of stress, shaping individuals' social positioning through variables such as education, income, and wealth, which in turn influence behavioral and academic patterns (Alami, 2013; D'Anguilli *et al.,* 2024; Rifat & Bithi, 2023). Empirical studies suggest that students from more affluent backgrounds benefit from greater parental involvement and resource availability, leading to enhanced academic performance and improved stress management (Jeynes, 2024; Kang *et al*.,2024). Additionally, gender disparities in stress levels have been observed, with female students exhibiting higher stress levels than their male counterparts (Steen *et al*., 2020). Moreover, those students with lower family economic status may have lower self-efficacy leading to poorer academic performance. The unsupportive environments may increase students' stress level and impede on their academic performance. Therefore, it can be observed that family economic status positively affects stress among tertiary learners.

H1c The Environmental Influences positively lead to Stress among university students

The literature highlights a range of factors influencing academic performance, including climatic conditions, homesickness, limited family contact, academic pressure, demanding study schedules, and experiences of bullying (Qamar *et al.,* 2015). These factors serve as key stressors that can impede university students' ability to perform academically. Drawing from the context of medical education, research suggests that undergraduate students transitioning to new social environments, distanced from their established support networks of family and friends, often experience increased psychological distress (Pancer *et al.*, 2000). Such environmental shifts may result in a perceived loss of control, necessitating adaptation to unfamiliar academic and social structures, which, in turn, heightens stress levels (Pfeiffer, 2001). The intensity of stress within academic settings also varies depending on the level of study where postgraduate students, particularly those pursuing master's and doctoral degrees face greater academic demands, which can exacerbate stress-related challenges (Ribeiro *et al.,* 2018). From a Social Cognitive Theory perspective, Bandura (1997) emphasises a bidirectional co-relationship between academic stress and self-efficacy, wherein heightened stress levels negatively impact students' confidence in their academic abilities (Liu *et al.,* 2024). Within the university setting, students are often exposed to high-pressure environments characterised by tight deadlines and performance-based evaluations, which shape their self-efficacy beliefs and contribute to academic stress. As Social Cognitive Theory suggests, observational learning and environmental reinforcements play an important role in students' ability to manage stress, ultimately influencing their academic outcomes. In this perspective, it is essential to assess whether environmental influences may have a positive impact on stress of university students.

H2 Stress is positively related to Academic Performance

Existing literature largely associates stress with low academic performance (Ben-Zur & Zeidner, 2012; Amirkhan *et al.,*2020)**.** This relationship is often attributed to reduced academic engagement and lower psychological capital, both of which are negatively influenced by persistent stress (Saleem *et al.,* 2022). A long period of academic stressors has been reported to be detrimental to physical and mental health outcomes, further exacerbating declines in academic performance (Freitas *et al.,* 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of perceived stress during a student's academic journey correlate with lower Grade Point Averages (GPA) (Tormon *et al.,* 2023). From a Social Cognitive Theory perspective, stress can influence academic performance through both positive and negative reinforcement mechanisms. While manageable levels of eustress may serve as performance motivators, distress often leads to diminished self-efficacy, thereby increasing academic pressures. Students with low self-efficacy are particularly vulnerable, as they may struggle to cope effectively under stress, leading to compromised academic outcomes. On the other hand, students with higher self-efficacy and healthy coping strategies may utilise stress as a catalyst for improved performance. Thus, the extent to which stress impacts academic achievement is largely contingent on students' cognitive appraisal, coping mechanisms, and perceived control over their learning environment. This denotes the need to further understand if stress has a positive or negative influence on academic performance.

H3 Stress and Alcohol use are positively interrelated

A growing literature portrays alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism to deal with stress. Studies by Dave *et al.*(2024) & McConaha *et al.* (2024) showcased the usage of alcohol by students during challenging times in their academic journey. The constructs of Social Cognitive Theory have been hugely used in research to understand behaviour in the fields of education, health, societal issues, and environment, to name a few (Mantey *et al.,* 2024; Maleki *et al.,* 2025; Bussey, 2023; Gan *et al.,* 2024). Social Cognitive Theory is adopted in this paper to demonstrate how low self-efficacy learners, when enduring higher levels of stress during their academic path, may consume alcohol as a coping strategy. The current study placed stress and alcohol as mediators to portray their use as a futile coping mechanism to deal with stress by tertiary-level students. Studies conducted on students at tertiary education (Samek *et al.,* 2024; Fruehwirth *et al.,* 2021) revealed a positive relationship between stress & alcohol use. Hence this paper proposes that there is a positive relationship between alcohol use and stress.

H4 Stress and Tobacco Use are positively correlated

The correlation between stress and tobacco has been debated amid literature encompassing several domains in social sciences. Empirical evidence provided consistent students' tobacco use, including youngsters, to manage stress triggered by various social aspects (Ekpenyong *et al*., 2024; Alves *et al*., 2022; Clendennen *et al.,* 2021). Both stress and tobacco are moderators in this study to understand the dynamic towards academic performance. The Social Cognitive Theory contributes to understanding tobacco use as learned behaviour from parents, family, and friends (Roble *et al.,* 2021). To *et al.,* (2024) suggested a positive correlation between stress and tobacco use among students in the education sector. This paper reinforces the need to test the relationship between stress and tobacco use.

H5 Alcohol Use and Academic Performance are positively interconnected

There is a growing literature based on the impact of alcohol use on academic performance among learners (Bugbee *et al.*, 2019; Chai *et al.,* 2020; El Ansari *et al.,* 2013). Wube *et al.,* (2024) found a relatively low academic performance among students who adopted alcohol use in contrast to those students who refrained from such maladaptive behaviour. Usually called "alcohol expectancies", these expectancies are examples of reinforcement linked to drinking (Dijkstra *et al.,* 2001; Cheng *et al.,* 2024). The Social Cognitive Theory explains the outcome expectations about perceived repercussions of alcohol consumption play a role in regulating drinking behaviour. Following this, testing the relationship between alcohol use and academic performance is crucial.

H6 Tobacco Use and Academic Performance are positively interrelated

Tobacco use has also been associated with obstacles to reaching optimum learning to take place (Kawafha, 2014). The author contextualised this study in Jordan depicting that smoking tobacco is detrimental to the learners' physical and mental development and consequently decreases their academic performance. Tobacco use among students causes an increased tendency to substance use, squandering study time, and acute health issues (Deressa *et al.,* 2020). Compared to cigarette smokers, students who abstained from smoking had a higher chance of earning good grades. This aligns with the results found among college students in Western cultures where cigarette smoking was linked to lower chances of academic success for Norwegian students (Stea *et al.,* 2014). Leveraging on the Social Cognitive Theory tobacco use as a personal and behavioural construct mediates between the sociocultural factors and the academic performance of university students. Extending on this approach, it is important to test the influence of tobacco use on academic performance.

H7a The relationship between Peer Rejection and Academic Performance is a positive one

Peer relationships and exchanges get more intricate and dynamic as students become older, and spend more time with their classmates (Lin *et al.,* 2024). Empirical evidence revealed that the influence of peer rejection leads to poor academic performance (Espelage *et al.,* 2013; Lorijn *et al.,* 2022). However, Brouwer *et al.,* 2022 contradicted this statement by stating that peers do not influence learning abilities and academic performance. Importantly, the relationship between peer rejection and academic performance still needs exploration. In this line, Social Cognitive Theory framework (Bandura, 2009) can be used to explain the behaviour that influences peer rejection among students. Thus, this study proposes that the relationship between peer rejection and academic performance can be positively interrelated among university students.

H7b Family Economic Status and Academic Performance is positively related.

There is a growing literature on the effect of family economic status on academic performance and academic success in the education sector whereby various research posited a low academic performance due to the parents' financial abilities towards the education of their children (Wu, 2024; Elharake *et al.,* 2022; Yang *et al.,* 2023). Social Cognitive Theory encompasses the dynamics between environmental, personal and behaviour factors to portray how the financial background of parents contributes to the academic performance of learners. Families with high economic status have adequate resources to meet the facilities required by learners in their academic paths. Hence, this study concludes a positive correlation between family economic status and academic performance in higher education.

H7c Environmental Influences are positively connected to Academic Performance

Environmental influences in this study refer to the diversity of factors that surround learners in their academic journey; the factors are peer influences, societal issues, services and facilities available, family dynamics, environmental issues, and adequate resources, amongst others. These antecedents have been well documented in previous studies, whereby low academic performance was found due to environmental influences (Iglesias-Pradas *et al.,* 2021; Gopal *et al.,* 2021; King *et al.,* 2024). Social Cognitive Theory explains behaviour of learners, which developed through various environmental influences in their academic lives. The positive environmental influences enhance self-efficacy, resulting in higher academic performance, and the negative environmental influences lead towards poor academic performance. In this philosophy, this study proposes a positive relationship between environmental influences and academic performance among university students.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the consistent literature by exploring the different sociocultural factors that impact on students' tertiary education. Pertinent factors, like peer rejection, family economic status, and environmental influences, are analysed in the academic life of learners. Furthermore, the variables of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use are examined as moderating roles towards academic performance. As portrayed in the literature, the behaviour of learners is influenced by various external factors such as cognitive factors and personal factors. Social Cognitive Theory is adopted in this paper to reinforce the interrelated dynamics between sociocultural factors and the mediating role of stress, alcohol, and tobacco use to understand the changes in academic performance. In this view, this paper proposes a conceptual model to understand the relationship between sociocultural factors, stress, alcohol and tobacco use on academic performance amid university. Given the importance of academic success, which ultimately contributes to the progress of the global society, the factors impacting academic performance should be closely monitored. Further studies can explore the determinants of cognitive aspects (self-efficacy, outcome expectancies and knowledge) in higher education. This will contribute to global society by emphasising on the key element of quality education.

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