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# Factors causing Low Achievement in Theology Students at Theological College in Semarang, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Education is an endeavour to advance human life. There are times in educational processes where students have low achievement. At Simpson Theological Seminary, there are thirteen low-achieving students within Class 2019. Since learning achievement reflects learning process accomplishment, a review is needed to find factors underlying low achievement. In order to find these factors, a qualitative phenomenological approach was used in conducting the research, which in the process employed thirteen lowachieving students as informants. The collected data were analysed using Miles and Huberman model analysis with three stages: data reduction with coding, presentation of the data from the coding to find the similarity of words, and conclusion or verification. The research shows that internal and external factors intertwine, creating a significant impact and causing low achievement. The dominant internal factor that, based on data percentage coverage, caused low achievement is psychological in nature: students from outside Java had adaptation difficulties. Some external factors also contributed to causing this condition, such as the lack of learning tools in the form of learning media and books in the library, the parents' less-than-affluent economic condition, which triggered the low purchasing power of students towards learning support facilities, and the crowded and noisy dormitory, which made it difficult for students to concentrate when studying.

Keywords: Low achievement; learning trouble; psychology of learning; theology students.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is an endeavor toward advancing human life, and therefore it plays a role in determining their future (Anthony & Essien, 2018). Through education, humans advance their knowledge and grow themselves in order to be able to compete in the world of work and to develop science for humankind. The success of education does not only come from the teachers, the means, or the students, but also the collective work between teachers, parents, students, the surroundings, and the education system. It can be obstructed by the emergence of problems, both internal and external. Similarly, one can achieve in learning due to internal and external factors in their life (Slameto, 2010).

In this sense, achievement is defined as the result reaped from the things which had been done (Dinama et al., 2016). Slameto (2010) also stated that learning achievement is much influenced by two things: things from within the individual and things from outside the individual. It is true that in higher education, the level of a student's achievement influence his/her study completion. Student achievement reflects function that can be aimed to direct their change of behavior. It is also the value of accomplishment which reflect their levels on how far they can accomplish goals stated by study programs determined by their respective educational institution (Arikunto, 2012; Waliyuddin & Sulisworo, 2022). Therefore, achievement is the value of students proven in the form of numbers, referred to as Semester Grade Point Average.

Mulyani (2010)stated that each individual always experience process in his/her life c. By learning, an individual has the ability to exhibit changes in their life, including changes in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Krathwohl, 2002; Mulyani, 2013). Purwanto also explained that studying is an endeavor to obtain intelligence or knowledge, to train oneself, and to change one's attitude or response caused by experience (2017). It means that one undergoing learning process experiences change while the teacher observes that through his/her learning achievement. A sustainable learning process is reflected on the grade point average (Essien et al., 2021). There will be students with low, medium, and high learning achievement. Learning results shown from grades are results from students' learning process. Learning achievement is evidence of learning activities in accordance with the weight achieved (Paskarina et al., 2021). It is a reflection in which one can measure one's learning achievement and success.

Since learning achievement reflects learning process accomplishment, a review is needed to find factors underlying low achievement if found, in order to effect sustainable maintenance which in turn improve learning quality (Umotong, 2012; Putry et al., 2020). In Simpson Theological Seminary, Ungaran (hereinafter referred to as STT Simpson), phenomena of low-achieving students were found. In the Odd Semester of 2019/2020 Academic Year, 51 freshmen enrolled in the Seminary. Based on the data collected from the Academic Bureau, of these 51 students, thirteen were found to have low achievement a year later, in the Odd Semester of 2020/2021. Hence, it is in the researchers' view that the factors causing this should be understood. By referring to the research by Darmawan and Triastanti, it is known that the Seminary had tried to coach students as a whole so that they can progress in their studies (2020). Results of the researchers' preliminary observation confirmed this, finding that lecturers had tried to organize learning sessions in a good manner. However, according to the information gathered from several students, the declining learning achievement was not caused only by the lecturer's style of teaching, but also by many others as well.

Based on this background, the researchers focused their research in the internal and external causing factors of low achievement in Class 2019 students of STT Simpson. The principal problem statement formulated in this research is: "What are the internal and external factors causing low achievement in Class 2019 students of STT Simpson?" In accordance with the problem statement, this research aims to find the internal and external factors causing low achievement in Class 2019 students of STT Simpson.

# METHOD

## Type of study

This study used qualitative phenomenological approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), phenomenological research is concerned with a phenomenon to find a visible reality. This research focuses on seeing and understanding the meaning of a person's experience with a phenomenal experience. Some students in 2019 Class of Simpson Theological Seminary, Ungaran, had a phenomenon of low achievement that called for in-depth study of internal and external cause variables.

## Study location and participants

The Simpson Theological Seminary in Ungaran, Central Java, Indonesia, was the site of this study. In order to choose potential respondents, the researchers gathered information on student grades for the 2019/2020 Academic Year and Odd Semester scores in 2020/2021 Academic Year. According to the researchers' careful analysis of these sources, thirteen students were found to have low performance. Ten of them were from East Nusa Tenggara while three were from Kalimantan.

## Instruments

In-depth interviews and documentation were conducted to obtain the data. There are two main question groups in the in-depth interviews, namely questions asking on internal and external factors. Internal factor questions consisted of questions covering physical conditions, psychological conditions, motivation, interests, attitudes, and talents. Meanwhile, external factor questions consisted of questions covering social surroundings, family, natural non-socio-environmental, and means and infrastructure. During interview sessions, these questions were developed to obtain in-depth information. Documentation was conducted on students' study report on 2019/2020 Academic Year and the Odd Semester of 2020/2021 Academic Year in order to determine the informants.

## Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model analysis technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data analysis consists of three stages: data reduction with coding, presentation of the data from the coding to find the similarity of words, and conclusion/verification.

## RESULTS

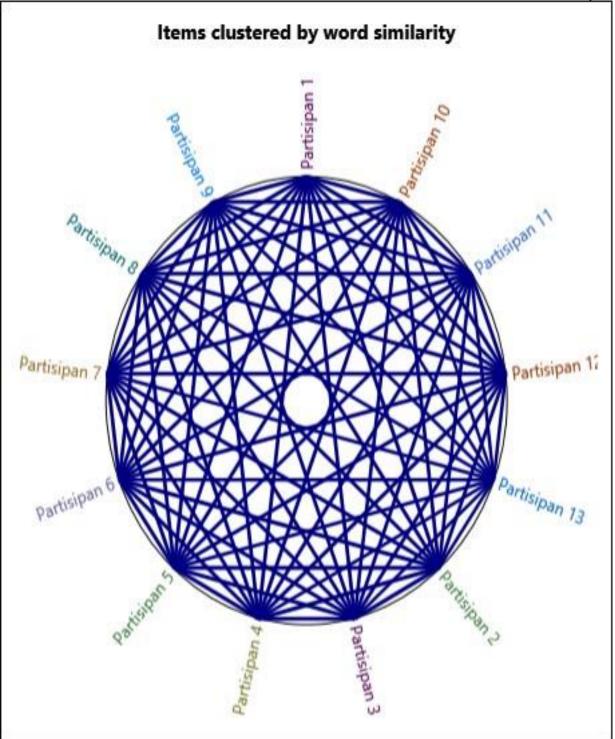
## Data analysis

Interview results were reduced to produce summaries of coding, themes, and sub-themes as shown in Table 1.

CODING	SUB-THEMES	THEMES		
Eye condition (myopia, blurred vision)	Physical ailments	Physical		
Headache		conditions		
Fever	Sickness			
Stomach-ache, nosebleed, and allergies				

#### Table 1. Summaries of coding, themes, and sub-themes.

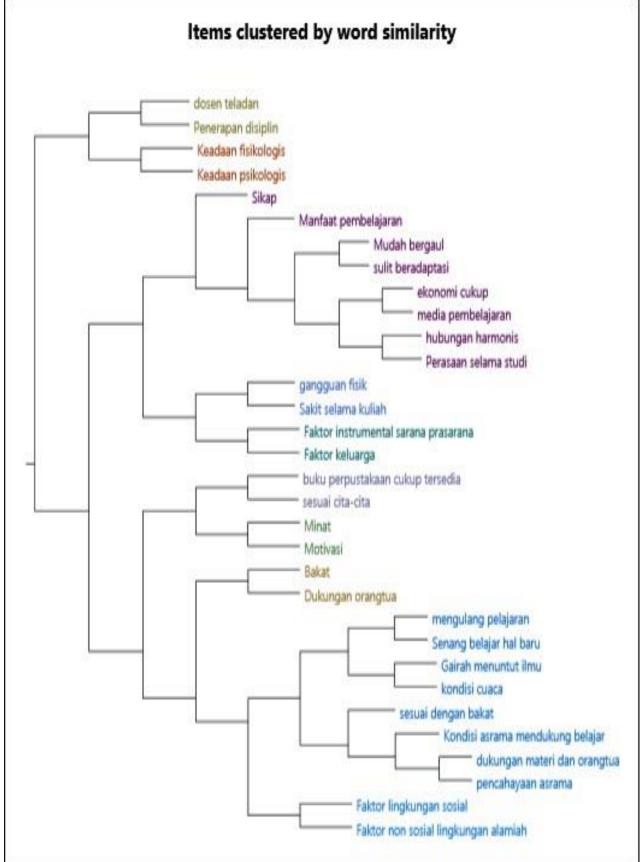
Fatigue		
Shyness	Association	Psychological
Difficulties in socializing		condition
Fear		
Strict rules	Adaptation	-
Adaptation difficulties and feelings of	1	
strangeness		
Lack of seeking for novelties	Study of new things	Motivation
Doing obligations only		
Lack of seriousness in doing assignment		
Non-supporting parents	Parental support	
Parental encouragement	11	
Lack of desire in learning	Desire in learning	Interest
Lack of own volition	0	
Unsuited to aspirations	Aspirations	
Frequent sadness during studies	Negative emotions	Attitude
Homesickness and pressure	0	
Advantageous learning	Learning advantages	1
Lack of talent	Talents	Talents
Lack of self-training	Course repeat	
Lack of course repeat	1 I	
Crowded dormitory	Dormitory condition	Social
Noise	5	surroundings
Disturbance caused by dormitory		0
condition		
Assertiveness of lecturers	Discipline enforcement	
Suitability with course contract and course		
plan		
Model lecturer	Model lecturer	
Lecturers' punctuality		
Lecturers' wisdom		
Non-harmonious family condition	Parental relationship	Family factors
Family harmony	_	
Adequate economic standing	Family economic	
Less-than-affluent economic standing	condition	
Parental support in financing the studies	Material support from	
Parental lack of support in financing the	parents	
studies		
Stiflingly hot weather	Weather condition	Natural non-
Lack of air fans in classrooms		socio-
Supporting lighting	Lighting	environmenta
Facilities with tolerable brightness		l factors
Ineffectiveness of online learning	Online learning	Means and
WiFi connection hindrance		infrastructure
Inability to fully understand lecture		
Frequently-changed book placements	Library books	
Difficulties in finding books		
Limited book supply		



Coding results as aforementioned were analyzed by using N-Vivo. shown in Figure 1 shows the analysis result in the form of similarity of utterances from all participants. The trend shows that interview results are reliable to be used as data for further analysis.

Figure 1. Similarity of utterances from all participants.

Figure 1 shows a globe constructed from the similarity of utterances from the informants' answers in the interview sessions on the causes of their low learning achievements. It shows a construction of symmetrical and correlating circles, meaning that similar factors were uttered as a collective cause for the informants' low learning achievements.



Analysis of N-Vivo nodes resulted in the similarity of utterances in the sub-themes formed as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Similarity of utterances in the sub-themes formed.

The Figure presents sub-theme groups formed from equivalent and/or synonymous words uttered by each participant on the cause of their low achievement. Some of the sub-theme groups formed were noted to have cause-effect relation while others were found to be equivalents. They were: 1) discipline enforcement, strongly correlating with lecturers' examples; 2) physical condition, synergistic with psychological condition; 3) difficulties in socializing, intertwining with adaptation difficulties; 4) parents' economic status, impacting learning media; 5) parent-child relationship, impacting students' feeling during their studies; 6) physical ailments, impacting illness experienced during study terms; 7) instrumental factor of means, related to infrastructure and family factor; 8) students' interests, strongly depending on students' motivation; 9) students' talents, related to family support; 10) dislike for lesson repetition, related to indifference in discovering new things; 11) desire for knowledge, synergistic with weather condition; and 12) socio-environmental factors, related to natural non-socio-environmental factors.

#### Data percentage coverage

The similarity of utterances in the sub-themes formed were then analyzed for its data percentage coverage. As presented in Tables 2 and 3, internal and external factors significantly impacted low student achievement. It was found from the data percentage coverage that internal factors had a more dominant role than the external ones.

CAUSES		% Coverage	Attributes
INTERNAL I		81.94	Yes
Physical	Eye or other physical condition	69.23	Yes
condition	Often struck with illness during study	61.54	Yes
Psychological factors	Difficulty in socializing with campus friends	53.85	Yes
	Difficulty in adapting with campus environment	100.00	Yes
Not happy to learn and discover newMotivationthings		92.31	Yes
	Parental support	23.08	Yes
Intonata	Not passionate in studying		Yes
Interests	Not conforming to aspirations	100.00	Yes
AttitudesNegative emotions during study (being sad, crying, experiencing bad moods, etc.)		92.31	Yes
	Study benefits	38.46	Yes
Talents	Not conforming to talents	92.31	Yes
	Not repeating failed courses	92.31	Yes

 Table 2. Percentage coverage of internal factors causing low student achievement.

Percentage coverage is the percentage of quoted coding referents from the participants' interview transcript used to determine coding order, which in this research refers to the causes of low student achievement sorted by the most personal ones. Table 2 shows that based on percentage coverage, internal causes sorted from the most personal ones are: 1) Psychological, namely that they experienced difficulties in adapting to campus life (rigid rules, difficult in adapting, feeling foreign); 2) Interest, namely that they did not see studying at STT Simpson as their own aspirations, which caused their disinterest; 3) Talents, namely that studying at STT Simpson did not conform to their

talents so that they did not repeat failed courses; 4) Attitude, namely the emergence of negative emotions during studies, such as sadness, pressure, and homesickness; 5) Motivation, namely that these students did not discover new things during their studies and only did their obligations, and they also did not seriously did it; 6) Physical, namely that they experienced eye disorders and frequent sickness during their studies.

CAUSES		% Coverage	Attributes
EXTERNAL FACTORS		54.00	Yes
	Dormitories support learning	76.92	No
Social surroundings	Discipline enforcement	0.00	Yes
	Model lecturers	7.69	Yes
	Harmonious relationship	38.46	Yes
Family factors	Adequate economic standing	76.92	No
	Material support from parents	15.38	Yes
Natural non-socio-	Weather supports learning	53.85	No
environmental factors	Dormitory lighting supports learning	7.69	Yes
Instrumental factor of means and	Online learning media applied by lecturer supports learning	92.31	No
of means and infrastructure	Adequate library books	46.15	No

**Table 3**. Percentage coverage of external factors causing low student achievement

Table 3 shows that based on percentage coverage, the external causes sorted from the most personal ones are: 1) Instrumental factor of means and infrastructure such as online learning media was not effective in supporting learning and library books were not adequately provided; 2) Family factors, namely the less-than-affluent economic condition of the students' families, which in turn did not enable them to obtain learning facilities like laptop; 3) Social surroundings, namely the crowded and noisy dormitories which disturbed their learning process; and 4) Natural non-socio-environmental factors, namely the weather condition which did not support learning process (stiflingly hot weather, added with the absence of air fans in classes).

## DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, it is evident that internal and external factors intertwined, creating significant impact. Of the two, the internal factors were more dominant, placing at 81.94% in the data percentage coverage, as opposed to that of external factors, sitting on 54%.

#### Internal factors

There were six internal factors found to be the causes of low student achievement. Research shows that physical factors did not significantly affect low student achievement. However, these factors do. The first dominant factor in this discussion is the psychological factors. Based on the research, it is apparent that the students experienced difficulties in adapting to the campus environment. Muna (2012) revealed that that psychological factors, especially that related to campus adaptation, can trigger low learning achievement. Muñoz et al., (2022) opined that the learning process at higher education level is not easy, which necessitates adaptation to campus environment. Every so often in this adaptation process, students feel foreign to new people they encounter, which in turn makes them unable to adapt to new surroundings. Difficulties in adapting can cause inability to meet academic demands. Besides, according to Raula and Handayani (2015), many students coming from outside Java island experienced difficulties in adapting to new conditions in Java caused by their lack of knowledge on their campus' conditions. There are phases of adaptation in which students are able to conquer and vice versa. Based on the opinions aforementioned, it is clear that people moving to new surroundings often feel strange, as exemplified by students coming outside Java when encountering new surroundings and education culture in Java. The different conditions in new surroundings, added with other psychological factors, caused low student achievement. The slow pace of adaptation causes difficulties in facilitating students' learning.

The second dominant factor is interest. Low interest came from the fact that these students did not see studying theology as their aspirations, which caused disinterest, whereas theoretically, interest plays an important role in growing enthusiasm in studying (Coon et al., 2019; Enos et al., 2021; O'Neil & Drillings, 2012). The high level of students' enthusiasm will encourage them to improve their competencies. The low interest apparently also impacted their efforts in learning new things. Research by Annamalai and Muniandy (2013) shows that the higher someone's interest is, the higher their intensity to pursue an activity will be. In conclusion, the low interest of these students in studying theology resulted in their low study diligence, which in turn caused their low learning output.

#### **External factors**

The first dominant external factor is the ineffective online learning media and the lack of library book supplies. Oluremi and Olubukola (2013) revealed that learning facilities had a significant impact to student performance. Ibrahim, Umar, and Clement (2017)also stated that limited facility can hinder or lower learning performance. Therefore, learning achievement also lowers. Dinama et al. (2016) explained that the provision of facilities, such as the adequate number of textbooks and the provision of computers, becomes the important factors in improving student performance. Limitations in learning support means provision hinder optimization of learning results. This factor apparently becomes one of the external causes of low student achievement.

Besides, the factor is compounded with the less-than-affluent economic condition of these students' families, which caused their low purchasing power towards facilities supporting their studies, such as textbooks and laptops. According to Akhtar (2012), low economic condition can lead to low supporting capacity of learning outcomes since it hampers the availability of learning facilities and resources. Even though in the present digital era learning materials are prevalent in the internet, but it become a significant obstacle if the media to access them is limited (Devi et al., 2019; Pujiono, 2021). Based on the researchers' observation, STT Simpson campus has been equipped with adequate internet broadbands, but students with no computers are not able to access digital mediabased learning materials. This in turn causes late improvement of students' knowledge.

The next factor is social surroundings, in which the crowded and noisy dormitory disturbs personal learning process. The non-supporting social condition can deprive students from the optimum concentration needed to study (Akhtar, 2012). By referring to research by Akhtar, crowds with uncontrollable noises can divert students' focus from studying to observing their surrounding situations. The dormitories' dense population which often cause rowdiness, especially in personal learning hours, lowers concentration to study. This condition is different from that supposed to encourage learning. Earthman opined that low noise level greatly helps students to improve their learning performance (2002). However, the research found that the learning environment was noisy enough that it lowered studying concentration, which in turn impacted learning achievement.

Lastly, natural non-socio-environmental factors, such as hot weather and the lack of air fans in classrooms did not support good learning process. This point contradicts Earthman's research (2002), which stated that comfortable classroom temperature greatly helps in improving students' learning performance. Therefore, low student achievement can be initiated by the non-supporting surrounding conditions.

#### CONCLUSION

Research shows that internal and external factors intertwine, creating a significant impact and causing low achievement. Of the two, internal factors became the dominant one, as shown in the data percentage coverage, which placed internal factors at 81.94%, compared to external factors at 54%. Of all internal factors, the psychological factor became the dominant one. Difficulties in adapting to new surroundings and the personal study pattern on campus triggered low learning results. Based on the data on students' origins, low-achieving students came from rural areas. This condition indeed necessitates an adequate amount of adaptation in order to successfully study. Furthermore, low interest in studying theology caused a lack of desire to learn. The amalgamation of these conditions posed significant obstacles for these students to finish their lecturers' assignments.

Despite the dominance of internal factors, external factors also contributed to low learning achievement. The lack of learning tools for these students, as shown by the ineffective online learning media and the frequent unavailability of books in the library, caused problems in optimising grades. This condition was further compounded by their parents' less-than-affluent economic situation, which caused them to have low purchasing power for textbooks and other learning facilities like laptop computers. The non-supporting social surroundings of the dormitory, with its many residents and the noise they create, caused a decline in concentration to study. Lastly, natural non-socio-environmental factors like the hot weather and the lack of air conditioning in class did not support a good learning process.

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