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## Factors Contributing to the Success in Competitive Examinations: A Review of Success Stories

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### Abstract

Competitive exams are considered as the gateway for carrier advancement. These help in shortlisting the candidates and select the most suitable person for the job advertised. The study in hand is an effort to explore success stories of selected candidates through Punjab Public service Commission (PPSC). The study adopted qualitative research approach, using interview protocol for data collection. The sample of the study consists of 15 lecturers serving under Higher Education Department. Convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample. Thematic analysis revealed diverse factors contributed to the success in competitive exams. These include cognitive abilities, preparation strategies, time management, stress management, role of motivation and mentorship, and psychological resilience. These insights may prove beneficial for future aspirants, educators and policy makers in designing better support system to enhance success rates in competitive exams.

### Keywords:

Competitive Exams, Cognitive Abilities, Time Management, Psychological Resilience, Mentorship, PPSC, Preparation Strategies

### 1. Introduction

Competitive examinations have become pivotal milestones for advancing careers and gaining access to elite educational institutions globally. These exams assess various skills such as knowledge, reasoning ability, and problem-solving aptitude. Given the high stakes and the growing number of aspirants, researchers have turned their focus to identifying the factors that contribute to success in competitive exams.

The PPSC (Punjab Public Service Commission) Lecturer Education exams are highly competitive, and identifying the factors that contribute to candidates' success can provide valuable insights for both future aspirants and educators. This review synthesizes existing literature on various success factors identified in competitive exams, with a specific focus on superior cognitive abilities, cognitive training exercises, strategic preparation, time management, stress and anxiety, psychological resilience, regular physical exercise and relaxation, mindfulness practices, motivation, and mentorship. These factors will be discussed in light of previous research to provide a comprehensive understanding of how they contribute to the success of candidates in the PPSC Lecturer Education exams.

### 2. Review of Related Literature

In general, there is a close relationship between competitive exams and academic excellence to professional success in many fields. With competition becoming quite fierce these days for academics, educators and students alike, it has become imperative to understand the components that would make us succeed in examinations. Previous research has shown that success in competitive exams is influenced not only by cognitive and intellectual capacities but also psychological resilience, planning strategies etc.

According to Woolgar et al (2021), high cognition such as reasoning, memory and processing speed required for academic performance proves to be far more critical in high-stakes tests. Thus it entails that it needs to be nurtured for competitive exams such as PPSC's Lecturer Education exam. The researchers found that the learners with higher cognitive abilities score better in tasks requiring sustained attention or problem-solving (Woolgar et al., 2021). Furthermore, Keresztes et al (2018) state the importance of memory development in adolescents and how this can affect academic skills positively, whereas improved cognitive capacities like working memory as well as long-term retrieval are strongly associated with better performance academically.

Cognitive training exercises can lead to improvements in cognitive abilities which play a key role when it comes to academic performance, such as exams. Chiu and Lin (2022) thus concluded that working memory combined with mental flexibility exercises had a positive effect on academic achievement. This is particularly important in case of PPSC competitive exams as you need to recall and remember numerous things. A meta-analysis from Shaw et al. (2021) also showed that cognitive training programs have proved useful in improving educational performance too. Therefore, these programs are a critical part of the preparation process for competitive tests like those of the PPSC.

Time Management and Smart preparation plays a significant role to score high in competitive exams. Mak and Yuen (2021) argue that testing with decisions made on test results is necessary to show the power of strategic learning as students use self-regulated, goal-oriented study strategies perform better than those who do not. Moreover, as Kounios and Beeman (2020) notes the ability to problem-solve is a critical skill set among those who can selectively track brain data in order that applicants possessing theory of mind skills have increased likelihood for success.

Metacognitive strategies and self-regulation (Glass & Lee, 2022) provide particular advantages as students can monitor their learning themselves and take actions accordingly. This importance of time management in academic or competitive field as a predictor for success has been acknowledged and are written already along with other factors (1,2). Britton and Tesser (2022) say that students who manage their time well in study are more prepared for tests, because they can go over more content so do not need to cram the night before. Time management plays a key role in reducing stress (stress harms performance) and helps to practice better study routines as well Silva & Almeida, 2019). An established academic, Macan (2021) argued that setting a clear goal and allocating time to accomplish one task at a time leads to better test scores.

In PPSC exams preparation, it is important for candidates to be able to manage their time well enough that they can work on weak areas while not losing the grip of overall preparation. Excessive stress and anxiety, in turn, are said to impede academic performance as well a cognitive function. A study made by Figueroa and Castillo (2019) suggest that exam anxiety also inhibits the capacity of recalling information in our memory. Ng and Ang (2020), for instance, are of the view that using coping strategies such cognitive-behavioral therapies could be effective in minimizing anxiety levels.

Besides other techniques, various stress management strategies, according to Richardson and Rosenthal (2020), can prove to be effective in enhancing performance in competitive exams. These strategies are deemed highly important for those aspiring to take competitive exams for better careers. Barlow and Sauer Zavala (2019) asserted that behavioral therapy strategies have the potential to accelerate focus and alleviate anxiety which ultimately improves performance in exams of competitive nature.

Resilience, the ability to bounce back after failing, is critical to success in exams (Lyons and Peacock, 2019) which can be highly rewarding in competitive exams like that of the PPSC Lecturer

Education. Ungar and Theron (2020) also have emphasized the importance of training on resilience as they portrayed in their research how it impacts success in exams. Engaging in various psychological exercises that can improve resilience level among the aspirants of competitive exams can also be effective in better dealing with stress and help them score higher Vanhoe et al (2020).

Relaxation techniques can also significantly minimize stress levels and result in improved performance in exams (Moreau and Conway, 2021). According to Pesce and Soussan (2018), cognitive skills such as memory and focus can also be refined through engagement in different relaxation activities. Such cognitive skills are crucial in exam success. Zeidan and Johnsons (2021) highlighted that contemplation activities to improve mindfulness can minimize anxiety and develop better concentration. Lowered anxiety, improved concentration span and better memory retention are characteristics critical to success in competitive exams such as that of PPSC Lecturer Education.

Furthermore, a study by Weares (2020) highlights that academic achievement and emotional regulation experience improve with the implementation of mindfulness programs, within educational environments. Furthermore, Bellinger and DeCaro (2019) discovered that practicing breathing techniques and engaging in other relaxation methods can enhance ones performance during exams and improve cognitive abilities.

In the light of research conducted by Ryan and Deci (2020), achieving good results in exams is often influenced by both drive and external factors like motivation levels as well as effort put into studying materials thoroughly. Their findings suggest that students who are naturally driven tend to excel because their passion, for the subject matter leads to an understanding of the concepts involved. Similarly, backed up by Schunk and Zimmermans (2020) studies was the notion that students who demonstrate self-regulated motivation are more inclined to adopting effective study strategies which consequently translates into improved performance during examinations.

Corpus & Wormington (2021) regard extrinsic motivation—such as the desire for recognition or rewards— as a strong motivator as well; however they claim that it works best when it is combined with intrinsic motivation. Mentorship offers students necessary guidance and support that can significantly increase their chances of navigating challenging exams. As Crisp and Cruz (2019) proved that properly mentored individuals tend to develop study routines and strategies that boost their achievements. Additionally, Lunsford and Baker (2018) opine that the emotional backing rendered by mentors assists students in handling the stress associated with tests. Mentoring is also helpful for the students in keeping them stay focused and motivated during exams as it offers them valuable advice, on how to overcome challenges (Dominguez and Hinojos, 2020).

High level thinking skills and effective planning strategies, along with handling stress and anxiety well are elements tied to achieving success in challenging exams based on research findings. These components pave the way for aspirants aiming to take the PPSC Lecturer Education tests. By enhancing their emotional readiness through methods, like mental exercises and physical activities, candidates can significantly improve their performance and increase their likelihood of achievement.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

This is an age of competition. In developing countries like Pakistan, there exist a huge gap between facilities provided and availability of resources. To get a handsome job and serve the country is the wish everyone has. But due to the increase in population and lack of vacant seats, it has become difficult to offer government job to every person having required degree. In such circumstances the concerned departments have to shortlist the candidates and search for the most suitable candidate for the post advertised. For this they use competitive exams. The current study is an effort to explore factors contributing success in those high stake exams. The crucial role of competitive exams in determining educational and career trajectories cannot be ignored. Despite extensive preparation, many candidates fail to achieve their desired outcomes. The aim of this study is to review success stories of those individuals who have excelled in these exams and secured a handsome job in their field.

### **4. Significance of the Study**

Competitive examinations are critical gateways to prestigious educational institutions and career opportunities. Thus understanding the determinants of success in these exams is crucial. This research is significant for several reasons.

Firstly, the empirical evidences excreted from the success stories of candidates make it acceptable for those who are preparing for these exams. it may provide insights into the academic practices and personal characteristics of candidates those distinguish them as successful candidate. The review of success stories may point out some common strategies and traits of successors which will be beneficial for followers. This may give them easy and approachable path towards success in competitive exams.

Secondly, this study may give emotional and motivational support to the candidates as meeting virtually or physically or having interview of successful candidate is itself a motivation. It is because that we often compare ourselves with those who had excelled in our field. It is the shortest way to get the destination. This study may highlight the role other supporting factors like family, friends, mentor etc. and as a result we may become able to select more reasonable company to live with them and follow them.

Thirdly, this research may prove beneficial for policy makers and educators to plan for better curriculum, learning resources and presenting strategies for future teaching. Study material, pedagogical approaches and learning environment are always considered to be the crucial factors in enhancing students' learning.

Furthermore, this study may play roll to have a level play field for all. This is a step towards ensuring equity and inclusivity. To conclude, this study will be a healthy addition in existing literature.

## **5. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to go through the success stories of qualified candidates to explore factors contributing to the success in competitive exams. The study was delimited to the lecturer of different subjects working under Higher Education Department of Punjab. Different research questions were made to inquire about the strategies employed by the participants; the support system they got throughout their journey; motivational factors and difficulties they faced.

## **6. Methodology**

The study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative studies are employed to have an in-depth examination of underlying facts of the phenomena. Qualitative research design focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals.

All employees who have got their job through any competitive exams were the target population of the study. Population refers to the total number of individuals or entities within a specific area or category. In research, population denotes the entire group of subjects that share common characteristics and from which samples may be drawn for analysis. Sample of this qualitative study consisted of 15 lecturers working in Higher Education Department. The participants were selected using convenient sampling technique. Convenient sampling techniques is employed to have easily excess to the participants. This non-probability technique is used when there are limitations of time and resources.

An interview protocol was developed by the researcher to seek the factors contributing success in competitive exams. Related areas were explored from literature review and a comprehensive interview protocol was developed covering the whole procedure of selection from preparation for the exams to recruitment. For validation of the instrument, two faculty members from the University of Okara, having sound experience in assessment and instrument development, were selected. The instrument was revised as instructed by the reviewers. After this, three mock interviews were recorded to have a pilot testing of the instrument. The participants of mock interview were not included in the real sample. The final draft of interview protocol having main and probing questions was used to collect data from selected sample.

## **7. Data Collection & Analysis**

To collect data, the researcher converted interview protocol into Google form to have easily excess to the participants and offer ease in their available time to respond the questions. Open-ended questions were arranged for the participants to share comprehensive responses about their experiences to

the success in competitive exams. The responses were recorded in Google form and excel sheet was downloaded for analysis.

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. It is a flexible approach that provides a rich, detailed, and complex account of data. The procedure includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. This method allows researchers to interpret various aspects of the research topic deeply.

## **8. Interpretation of Interview Responses**

After familiarizing with data, similar codes were grouped to generate themes and sub-themes. Major themes emerged from the data include preparation strategies, support system, motivational and success factors, and challenges faced during their journey of success. The data also explored some suggestions for future aspirants. Below is given a detailed expression of these themes. The description is enriched with nodes for the comprehension of the reader.

### **Theme 1: Preparation Strategies**

This theme deals with all those strategies which the respondents had employed during their preparation for the competitive exams. These strategies were related to their selection of material, study schedule, and utilization of online resources. The data explored that Interviewees utilized a diverse range of study materials and resources, highlighting the importance of a well-rounded preparation approach. Many relied heavily on their textbooks and notes from BS and M.Phil courses, and others supplemented these with past papers to understand exam patterns as stated by T1 and T5.

*I had my BS and M.Phil books and notes. In addition to understand the structure of the test i read out past papers of the aforementioned subject (T1).*

*My BS course books helped me a lot (T5).*

Some participants like T2, T4, T9 and T14 reported that online resources like YouTube and social media platforms played a significant role in their preparation.

*I prepared for the exam with the help of a book, YouTube, face book pages and whatsapp groups(T2).*

*I consulted to a variety of book available in market internet resources and YouTube for lectures (T4)*

*Talking about the study material which helped me a lot, then obviously, first I will mention the books, then there are the social media platforms where I interacted with other people. And we used to discuss, these are the two things that are very helpful, books and social media, but the obvious thing about social media is to use it positively (T9).*

*Books, Articles, social media and YouTube channels were consulted by me (T14)*

The use of market books and authentic notes prepared by CSPs was also common, as stated by T4. Some interviewees reported that they had created their own handwritten tests and engaged in mock interviews for better practice (T2).

*I made my own hand written tests and also given mock interviews (T2).*

*I took help from authentic notes prepared by CSPS and for competitive exams (T4).*

Daily study routines varied among interviewees, with some dedicating as much as 15 hours a day to their studies, as stated by T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T11, while others preferred shorter, focused sessions like T2, T6.

*As I was not a full time job holder before my current allocation so I use to manage 6-7 hours of study daily (T1).*

*I mostly spent 1-2 hours for preparation, in the night time, for one month only (T2).*

*I gave 8 hours on daily basis (T4).*

*I try to study maximum in one day without any disturbance (T6).*

*i didn't sleep until finish a book in the whole day, it was my goal to finish a book in every 24 hours (T11).*

It was emerged from the data that structured study schedules and time management were crucial for maintaining consistency, as stated by T9 and T11.

*Time management has been a very crucial problem throughout the duration because I was also doing research for MPhil and my job was also going on (T9).*

*Time managing and focusing on my goals and achievements were very crucial for me to keep myself consistence (T11).*

The data also explored that the revision of key concepts and focusing on general knowledge was a common strategy among most of the participants to ensure comprehensive understanding and readiness for exams, as stated by T1, T4, and T11.

*I thoroughly read out all the basic components/subjects that majorly contribute to the umbrella term Education (T1).*

*I visited subject specialist for getting in depth knowledge (T4).*

*I consulted market books+ past PPSC+ G.K+ online study. I prepared myself before exam with good preparation of subject (T11).*

## **Theme 2: Support Systems**

This theme is related to the support of family, friends, teachers and mentor during preparation. We are very much attached with these individuals; therefore their positive or negative impact cannot be ignored. The data revealed the fact that emotional and motivational support from family and friends was crucial for many interviewees. Majority of respondents were of the view that positive reinforcement and encouragement helped them stay motivated.

*Yes I had emotional support from my family and friends (T1).*

*Family provided me food and ease and performed all my work instead of me, to support my studies (T5).*

*Friends' suggestions and advice are very helpful (T12).*

*Yes, my family gave me time and encouragement (T13).*

Other participants like T2, T9 and T11 reported that practical support provided by my family included providing free time from domestic chores and financial assistance. My family and friends often perform chores to allow more study time.

*My family supported me in providing me free time from domestic chores, my teachers helped my according to their knowledge and experience, my friends provided my motivation and emotional support (T2).*

*Friends, family and mentors have been praying a lot and everyone has been very supportive and motivated and they have supported me as much as possible. They didn't put burdens on the housework (T9).*

*A huge support from my family was there, especially from my elder brother and Father. They didn't allow me to work as a private job and always said me to prepare you for better opportunities (T11)*

The data also explored that teachers and mentors played a significant role by motivating the interviewees to study hard and providing basic concepts and guidance. It was reported by T1, T9 and T10 that the

formation of study groups for target-based preparation and interactive learning through social media groups was beneficial.

*Moreover, my teachers motivated me to study hard but did not provide any helpful material (T1).*

*My mentors, my teachers always motivate me whenever I go to them. Mentors provide material, some guidance, instructions, how to manage things and very supportive (T9).*

*There were some individuals who always motivated me though and my teachers were among them (T10).*

### **Theme 3: Motivational Factors**

This theme is related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive the respondents to continue their efforts. The data explored that an inner passion for learning and a deep interest in the subject drove many participants to excel in their field. In addition, the desires to achieve, secure a job, and fix family situations were strong motivational factors among some respondents.

*To get any job and to remove the title of jobless person was the biggest source of inspiration for me (T6).*

*It was my aim to get this job that keeps me motivated (T7).*

*All those above, securing a good job gave me strong motivation and spirit for the preparation (T14).*

In the same way, positive reinforcement from family and friends played a significant role in maintaining motivation. Inspirational success stories of peers provided additional motivation to some successors like T1 and T11. Additionally, Religious faith and trust in divine support were crucial for many interviewees.

*I always hear some positive remarks about myself from my family members and friends that I have the potential to ace such exams so their belief, positive words, and nice gestures kept me motivated throughout the preparation. While my inner passion for learning and a little understanding of education make it happen. Continuous and steady habit of reading was one of the main factors (T1).*

*I tried to become superior in every class and competed with shine students. This habit of study made my preparation (T11).*

### **Theme 4: Success Factors**

This theme explored numerous factors related personal qualities and practices which were emerged from the data. Majority of the respondents were of the view that consistency and continuous learning was key qualities for success. Additionally, staying calm and confident during exams and interviews was essential according to some of the interviewees. Similarly, thorough preparation and practice, it is ensured to have a solid understanding and readiness for the exams.

*Parents and teachers' prayers, Consistent preparation, clear understanding of the concepts and in-depth knowledge of the subject, indomitable trait, Hardworking (T1).*

*Clear the concept, avoid rote memorization, maintain notes, watching YouTube videos, clarifying confusing topics and show confidence in interview, have faith in God and trust yourself, stay away from negativity spreaders (T2).*

*Clear concepts and clear communication (T3).*

*Continuity consistency and if you don't lose hope you will win one day (T4).*

*Hard work along with consistency and self- confidence that those selected are similar to you and not that much genius than you (T6).*

Additionally, some participants favored extensive reading along with dedication, commitment, continuity in efforts and trust in divine force for their success in the exam.

*Extensive reading, Sound Concept, be actual, Confidence, and ultimately prayers (T8).*

*If I talk about the factors or factors that have contributed to my success, first I will thank Allah, then my parents, my family, my teachers and my friends because they supported me at every place (T9).*

*Commitment, dedication, planning and little bit of luck (T10).*

*Subject command with good eye contact (T11).*

*Prayers and preparation with hope and confidence (T12).*

*Setting daily goals and staying focused (T13).*

*Quality time for preparation, healthy discussion on problematic topics, testing and practice, touch with the current affairs, continuously study and revision (T14).*

In the same way, majority of the participants favour the role of academic qualification. They were of the view that academic marks played a significant role in determining merit and overall success.

*It has a significant role in the determining the merit so yes it played an important role (T1).*

*It does matter in my case (T8)*

*Academic marks play a significant role in success (T10).*

*Academic marks play an effective role in competitive exams (T11).*

However, a few goes against others. They were of the view that the deficiency in academic marks may be overcome through interview.

*I think marks didn't matter if you are good in verbal communication and up to dated knowledge (T4).*

*A bit but that can be overcome by obtaining high marks in interview (T5).*

*No significant role academic marks play. I had a second division master degree as a private candidate. So i don't think academic marks matter much (T13).*

The data also emerged several interview strategies like focusing on personality and appearance. Professional dressing was important to get confidence in the interview, as stated by T2, T5 and T7.

*First of all I focused my outer personality, formal dressing, professional shoes, watch, bag, all these things raised my confidence, i revised the most repeated questions, tried to keep calm myself etc (T2).*

*On interview only your personality is judged. My persona and dressing added greatly (T5).*

*Focused much on my physical appearance (T7).*

Additionally, Effective communication and clear presentation of concepts were crucial during interviews, as reported by some of the interviewees. Similarly, managing anxiety and staying composed under pressure were essential for success according to some of the participants.

*I just review the basic concepts, theories and some GK. And on the interview day i just relaxed myself and went for the interview (T1).*

*Clear concepts and clear communication (T3).*

*Internet resources and met those participants who had gone through interview (T4).*

*I didn't make any special preparation for interview. I just worked on the basics and tried to keep myself calm and relaxed. I believe confidence and communication skills matter the most in interviews (T10).*

*This is the last one of lectureship interview that can satisfied and motivated me for the job, so testing and interviewing again and again boost your passion for success (T14).*

## **Theme 5: Challenges Faced**

Here, different challenges are discussed the participants had to face during their success journey. The data emerged that balancing study with other responsibilities was a common challenge. Interviewees managed their time between research, job, and study, ensuring that they had to spend adequate time on preparation despite other commitments.

*My biggest challenge was to cover all the topics in short time period. I managed to focus on important topics (T2).*

*Responsibilities of family were the biggest problem for me. I overcome that through family support (T5).*

*Time management has been a very crucial problem throughout the duration because I was also doing research for MPhil and my job was also going on and during that time I had to manage, so I tried to do it on my mobile as well (T9).*

*The challenges include time managing and focusing on my goals and achievements (T11).*

*Biggest challenge was the quality time and budget to maintain and retain the job and the home circle (T14).*

Additionally, consistency under pressure was essential to keep steady study habit, as reported by T3 and T10. It was reported that the biggest challenges includes meeting the expectations of others who trust you.

*The biggest challenge for me was consistency in learning (T3).*

*The biggest challenge was to live up to the expectations of those who had complete faith in my potential. To overcome this challenge, I put my extra efforts in preparation (T10).*

The data also revealed that managing stress and anxiety was a significant challenge, with interviewees overcoming exam anxiety through prayers and staying calm. Handling pressure and maintaining confidence were crucial for success. Some participants reported that dealing with negativity from others and maintaining self-belief and inner motivation were also important.

*It was so tough. Before a day I couldn't sleep and a lot of anxiety there. My heart was beaten heavily and I was shivering. I just prayed to Allah keep me strong in front of panel (T4).*

*I didn't make any special preparation for interview. I just worked on the basics and tried to keep myself calm and relaxed. I believe confidence and communication skills matter the most in interviews (T10).*

*It is the natural process that a man becomes tense and pressuring during exam and interview, to overcome this situation. A healthy discussion with your room fellows or neighboring seat person can lower your level of tension (T14).*

Limited access to coaching classes and proper guidance was another challenge, leading interviewees to rely on self-preparation, as stated by T2, T6, and T9. Another participant said that overcoming financial and emotional stress was another hurdle.

*I didn't any paid group, however i joined some free whatsapp groups (T2).*

*Financial and emotional stresses were my challenges (T6).*

*No I didn't join any coaching class due to lack of resources (T9).*

*I didn't join any coaching classes neither I join any study group for preparation (T11).*

### **Theme 6: Advice for Future Aspirants**

The collected data explored the intentions of interviewees about future aspirants. Interviewees advised future aspirants to be persistent and focused in their preparation. They were asked to avoid distractions and negativity and maintain a productive study environment. Additionally, setting clear goals and daily targets helped in organizing and achieving study milestones.

*Just be persistent in preparation, you will definitely ace it (T1).*

*I would like to say that don't accept defeat before competition, don't put ear on rumors regarding corruption, references and bribery. If you win merit you will be selected. Just think and plan. Planning is very important. Divide your time and set targets. Be consistent and focused. Your hard work will definitely pay you (T2).*

*Use AI and YouTube for preparation. Use authentic learning material (T3).*

*You should be ambitious and have clear expectations if you want to accomplish this goal (T8).*

*All I would like to say to the future aspirant is to always keep your goal straight and stay connected with your preparation somehow when you take a gap in it or leave it, there is a gap in it, and then there is a problem. One day or the other, whatever success you have, you will definitely get it (T9).*

The data also emerged that trusting in one's abilities and divine support was a common piece of advice given by the participants of the study. Furthermore, embracing failures and continuing efforts consistently were seen as important for long-term success. Similarly, staying motivated and drawing inspiration from successful individuals helped maintain a positive outlook, as stated by some of the interviewees.

*Be consistent. And don't see others success. Do focus on your efforts and learning (T4).*

*Hard work along with consistency and self-confidence that those selected are similar to you and not that much genius than you (T5).*

*Make it as aim and put all your efforts to achieve it (T7).*

*Study and study a lot. Don't look for shortcuts (T10).*

*Many obstacles will come in your journey like sometimes you will lose your best enjoying moments, don't see at the small private jobs during your goals preparation. Prepare yourself with calm and patients (T11).*

*Ignore whatever you are told. Trust your intuition. Prepare as best as you can and always trust on Allah (T13).*

## 9. Conclusion and Discussion

The study in hand was developed to have an analysis of success stories of selected candidates HED to point out factors contributing their success in competitive exams. After the careful study of all the data, the study concluded that diverse study materials and resources were essential, including textbooks, notes, past papers, online resources, and social media platforms. Some participants also created their own handwritten tests and engaged in mock interviews for better practice. In the same way emotional and motivational support from family and friends was crucial. Practical support from family members, such as handling domestic chores and providing financial assistance, was also significant. Teachers and mentors played a key role by motivating and guiding the interviewees.

An inner passion for learning and achieving personal goals drove many participants. Positive reinforcement from family and friends, inspirational success stories, and religious faith were major motivational factors. Some participants were motivated by the desire to secure a job and improve family situations. Consistency, continuous learning, and thorough preparation were highlighted as key qualities for success. Staying calm and confident during exams and interviews, effective communication, and professional dressing were essential strategies. Academic marks played a significant role in determining merit and overall success.

Time management was a significant challenge, especially for those balancing studies with other responsibilities. Managing stress and anxiety, dealing with negativity, and maintaining self-belief were crucial for success. Limited access to coaching classes and proper guidance led many to rely on self-

preparation. Interviewees advised future aspirants to be persistent, focused, and avoid distractions. Setting clear goals and daily targets were recommended. Trusting in one's abilities, embracing failures, staying motivated, and drawing inspiration from successful individuals were seen as important for long-term success.

The findings from the current study have alignment and divergence with previous research. The current study underscores the importance of cognitive abilities, strategic preparation, time management, stress management, psychological resilience, motivation, mentorship, and emotional support, which align with much of the existing literature.

In terms of cognitive abilities, the present study concurs with previous research that superior cognitive skills such as memory retention, reasoning, and problem-solving are critical for academic success. Woolgar et al. (2021) and Keresztes et al. (2018) similarly highlight that individuals with better cognitive abilities perform more effectively in high-stakes examinations. Additionally, Pandey (2021) emphasizes the importance of cognitive flexibility, which the current study also acknowledges, particularly in the need for adaptability in competitive exam settings. However, the present study notes a reliance on self-preparation and market resources, which may contrast with the emphasis on formal cognitive training in studies by Chiu and Lin (2022). This divergence suggests that while candidates often depend on accessible materials, formalized cognitive exercises could offer additional benefits.

Strategic preparation and time management emerged as crucial factors in both the current study and previous literature. The current study highlights that candidates who employed structured study schedules and goal-oriented learning performed better, aligning with findings by Mak and Yuen (2021) and Glass and Lee (2022), who also advocate for self-regulation and metacognitive strategies. The critical importance of time management, as identified by Britton and Tesser (2022), is further reinforced by this study. However, the challenges of balancing study with other responsibilities, a theme prevalent in the present research, echo findings from Singh and Rajan (2020), showing the nuanced difficulties candidates face in managing their time effectively.

Stress and anxiety management are significant determinants of success in competitive exams, and both the current study and previous research support this assertion. Figueroa and Castillo (2019) emphasize the detrimental effects of anxiety on cognitive performance, while Ng and Ang (2020) argue for the benefits of coping strategies like cognitive-behavioral interventions. The current study aligns with this by showing that candidates managed anxiety through practices such as prayer, relaxation, and staying calm under pressure. This focus on psychological resilience is consistent with the findings of Lyons and Peacock (2019) and Ungar and Theron (2020), who highlight that resilient students are better able to cope with the pressures of high-stakes exams.

Regarding motivation and mentorship, the current study aligns closely with existing research. Ryan and Deci (2020) and Schunk and Zimmerman (2020) emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation, which leads to deeper engagement and better performance, a theme mirrored by the present research. Additionally, the role of mentorship is well-documented in studies by Crisp and Cruz (2019) and Kumar and Singh (2022), showing that mentors provide critical support and guidance. Candidates in the current study highlighted mentorship as a key factor in their success, offering emotional and practical support during preparation.

Finally, the role of emotional and physical support from family, friends, and physical well-being is a notable finding in the current study. This aligns with previous research by Moreau and Conway (2021) and Pesce and Ben-Soussan (2018), who demonstrate the positive effects of physical exercise and relaxation on cognitive function and stress management. In conclusion, while the current study largely corroborates existing research on success factors in competitive exams, the reliance on self-preparation and the challenges of balancing multiple responsibilities offer unique insights into the specific struggles faced by candidates in competitive environments.

## **10. Recommendations**

On the basis of finding, below are given a few practical recommendations to follow.

1. All available resources need to be utilized, reviewed and approached to have a comprehensive understanding of the topics.
2. It is recommended to create a structured and realistic study plan. There must be specific daily or weekly goals.
3. The aspirants may engage themselves in cognitive training exercises, such as memory games and puzzles, to enhance mental agility.
4. Along with mental exercises, regular physical exercise may boost cognitive function and overall well-being of aspirants. The aspirant should not keep themselves locked in a dark and dump room. Instead they should keep themselves healthy to get the maximum benefits from their energies.
5. Seeking mentorship from experienced individuals for valuable guidance and feedback throughout the preparation process will always prove beneficial. The students should keep themselves in touch with their teachers and other learned persons.
6. The aspirants are recommended to build a strong support system of family, friends, or peers to stay motivated. This may give them emotional and practical assistance during exam preparation.

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