

My failure story

The CAF News letter publishes winning essays of the 2023 'KAISTian Failure Story Contest'. The two winning essays in this issue are recipients of the "Challenge Award." They share experiences of KAISTians who are constantly attempting, challenging themselves, experiencing failures and setbacks, and learning valuable life lessons as a result.

Winning essays from the CAF contest

KAISTian story



Triumph through Trials: A Journey of Resilience and Success

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As a graduate of a prestigious university, the allure of financial success has always been at the forefront of young minds. Many students, driven by dreams of wealth and happiness, embark on this path in hopes of achieving their aspirations. However, the journey toward absolute achievement and success is often fraught with unforeseen challenges and obstacles. As the saying goes, 'life is not a bed of roses,' and this sentiment holds true. What follows is not just an essay, but a genuine account that unveils my personal odyssey towards my dream university, KAIST.

With the advent of modern technology and the growing global emphasis on pursuing higher education for a better life, competition has intensified. As someone born into an Air Force family, I was fortunate to have access to a quality education system in Pakistan. However, the transient nature of my family's life, dictated by the frequent postings in the army, meant that I had to make sacrifices when it came to maintaining long-lasting friendships. Despite this challenge, my determination to pursue my dreams remained unwavering, leading me to enroll in Pakistan's top-ranked university, NUST.

Undergraduate studies mark a pivotal turning point in one's life, where one shapes their career for a brighter future. My time at NUST was instrumental in shaping my vision to become a mechanical engineer. Throughout this journey, I encountered numerous failures that I had to confront before successfully graduating, aided by a merit-based scholarship. One such failure that remains memorable was our final year project. It happened during the Christmas holiday, on the 25th of December, just two days before our group demonstration. Our product was not performing up to par, and immediate fixes were required. While everyone else chose to enjoy the holiday break, I made a different decision. I visited the concerned individuals despite feeling exhausted and mentally strained. I held onto a single vision – to see it through, for the future hinges on utilizing time effectively. Eventually, I managed to rectify our term project. Our efforts proved fruitful, and I received the highest grade for my contribution. However, for me, it served as more than just an achievement; it served as motivation to strive for even greater things.

The desire to secure a good job post-graduation is not solely reliant on hard work; it also hinges on our

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ability to learn from failure. This lesson became apparent to me after facing multiple rejections from companies due to my lack of interview and test preparation. I even took up a position at an automotive company, but destiny soon guided me back to NUST, where I embarked on a Master's degree. This transition brought about a profound realization - the importance of learning from setbacks and actively improving oneself. The rejection letters I received became valuable reminders of the areas I needed to work on. With newfound determination, I embraced the opportunity to delve deeper into my field of study, armed with an understanding of the significance of interview preparation, academic excellence, and personal growth. This journey not only broadened my knowledge but also equipped me with the skills necessary to thrive in the competitive job market, fostering resilience and confidence in my chosen career path. The journey of climbing upward demands significant energy and time, yet the view from the top never fails to inspire with its beauty. Initially, higher studies were not on my radar, but my passion for mechanical pursuits eventually led me back to the field of Mechanical Engineering. However, this time my focus shifted from hands-on experiments to simulations. To achieve my research goals during my Master's program, I embarked on learning the ANSYS software. This undertaking presented its own set of challenges, as I simultaneously held a teaching position as a lecturer in the mornings and attended evening classes for my Master's degree.

The nature of my job as a lecturer was rather unconventional, as it required me to endure a 90-minute commute from my home to the institute. This journey involved a unique aspect – a 25-minute boat ride from one shore to the institute located on an island. Moreover, teaching international students posed a greater challenge, demanding not only an extensive knowledge base but also effective management skills to engage with a diverse group of learners. However, fueled by unwavering determination and a dream of a successful future, I persevered through this phase. Remarkably, within a span of just 15 months, I achieved my Master's degree while maintaining the same scholarship that had supported my academic pursuits. Additionally, my efforts were recognized with the honor of receiving the Best Teacher Award from the institute.

This phase of my journey exemplifies the trials and triumphs encountered while striving for excellence. The arduous balancing act of teaching, commuting, and pursuing higher education reinforced my resilience and sharpened my time management skills. It reinforced the notion that with unwavering dedication and an unwavering vision, success is attainable, regardless of the obstacles faced along the way. This chapter not only propelled my academic achievements but also instilled within me a sense of fulfillment and the confidence to embrace new challenges as I continue to chart my path toward a fulfilling and prosperous future.

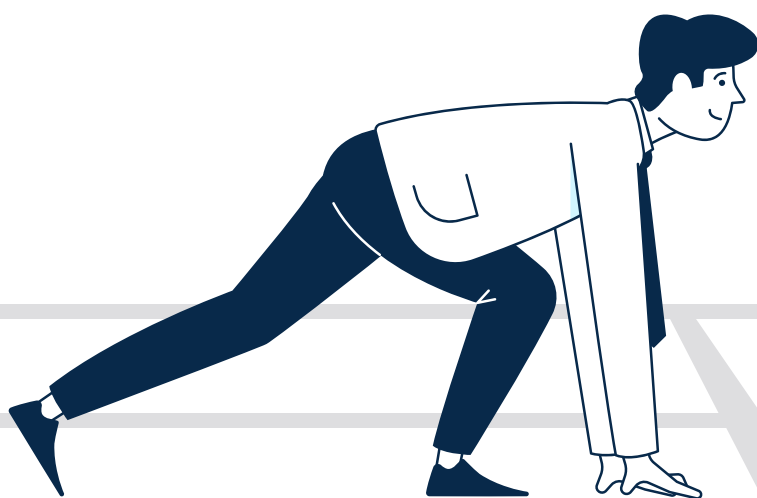
Life experiences play a crucial role in our journey toward success. To achieve true success, one must maintain unwavering dreams and engage in continuous work, regardless of the pace. My initial teaching job experience opened doors to a subsequent, larger, and more challenging teaching position. Over the course of three years, I faced numerous hardships, shouldering continuous academic and administrative responsibilities amidst minimal encouragement from higher management.

However, amidst these trials, I undertook to create and advance a society called

BAQRIX. This platform provided training to young engineers for a wide range of engineering and non-engineering events. Through this initiative, I acquired various skills essential for future employment and built a remarkable portfolio to foster professional connections. Additionally, I achieved the significant milestone of publishing my first-authored paper and delivering an impactful presentation at an international conference. These accomplishments served as a genuine catalyst, propelling me to strive for further achievements.

As the tides turned in my favor, the culmination of these experiences led to my selection for a Ph.D. program at KAIST in South Korea. This opportunity represented a pivotal moment in my journey, reaffirming my commitment to continuous growth and the pursuit of higher academic goals.

Kaist, a competitive and promising university, beckons those with ambitious dreams. However, great dreams often require significant sacrifices. Just a month after arriving in September 2019, I faced the heart-wrenching challenge of separation from my ex-partner, which dealt a heavy blow. Additionally, I



grappled with the responsibility of supporting my family financially and emotionally while being away in Korea, uncertain of the duration of my stay. Leaving behind the familiar comforts of home, I embarked on a journey encompassing a new lifestyle, unfamiliar faces, a different culture, diverse cuisine, a foreign environment, rigorous academics, and occasional bouts of loneliness. These challenges, though daunting, have forged resilience within me, amplifying my appreciation for personal growth and the transformative power of embracing new experiences.

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The stress and challenges of academic life can leave one feeling alone and abandoned in society. Pursuing postgraduate studies at Kaist requires tremendous dedication and effort. The demanding research journey can take a toll on the mind. The university environment is highly competitive, demanding continuous hard work to achieve goals. My experience was particularly tough as my research topic shifted from mechanical engineering to chemicals and materials. Despite the obstacles, my unwavering ambition and determination pushed me forward. There were moments of solitude, feelings of defeat, and overwhelming stress, almost causing me to shatter into pieces, unsure of what to do next. However, my resilience and positivity always propelled me to keep moving forward. From the depths of these struggles, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, I was reborn, ready to embrace a new life filled with happiness and success.

Amidst failures and setbacks, your persistent efforts will pave the way to your ultimate success. The Ph.D. journey is filled with chaos and challenges, requiring unwavering determination to pursue your visions. I encountered two instances where my experiments were rendered null due to irreparable machine breakdowns. Even amidst the disruptions caused by the global pandemic, my ambition remained unyielding. I faced lockdown restrictions in spring 2020 and contracted COVID-19 in February 2022. Additionally, I underwent nose surgery in mid-2021, further adding to the hurdles I had to overcome. Furthermore, a broken elbow in April 2022 rendered me unable to conduct experiments until August 2022. Despite these adversities, the kindness and support of my Professor propelled me forward, inch by inch, toward the completion of my successful Ph.D. journey.

Despite facing numerous setbacks and challenges, I found myself honored with prestigious positions that surpassed even my wildest dreams. My innate helpful and kind nature led to my unofficial role as a mentor, guiding Pakistani and international students in navigating life at Kaist. Subsequently, I was granted mentorship positions multiple times by ISSS, where I had the privilege of assisting new students in their Kaist journey. However, the true motivation and strength derived from the sense of responsibility that accompanied these roles.

In August 2021, I was chosen to serve as the President of the Pakistani Community in Kaist, a position I held with pride. The following year, in Spring 2022, I was selected as the General Secretary for the Muslim Community in Kaist, taking on additional responsibilities within the university. While I voluntarily stepped down from the Presidentship, desiring others to have the opportunity, it seemed as though Kaist had more positions in store for me. In June 2022, I assumed a management role for Pakistani students in the international kitchen. I was honored to lead the Pakistani team twice for the Kaist International food festival in 2021 and 2022 respectively. These cumulative experiences further reinforced the valuable lessons learned from past failures, empowering me to embrace leadership with resilience and strength.

Finally, all the efforts and perseverance have paid off, and the taste of success is truly sweet. I had the honor of being awarded as the best presenter at a conference, and since then, I have had the privilege of presenting my work at two more conferences. Furthermore, I have co-authored papers in two highly esteemed journals with a significant impact factor. Currently, I am actively engaged in three separate research

projects, diligently working on writing papers and collaborating with researchers from around the world, one of them being Georgia Tech University. This newfound confidence has strengthened my belief that I will soon earn my doctoral degree.

The journey of failure may discourage and push you to your lowest point multiple times, but what truly matters is your ability to rise up after each fall. Your past serves as a valuable lesson, shaping your present to learn and strive for continuous improvement. As you work towards your betterment, the future holds the promise of remarkable achievements that will benefit you and inspire and teach others.

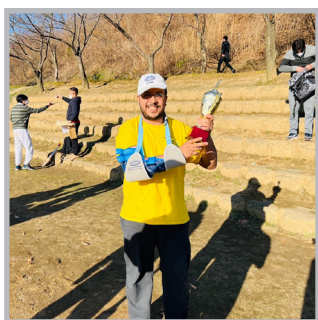
In conclusion, the power to shape your goals, success, and vision for a bright future and fulfilling life lies within your own hands. Learning to smile amidst the pains and challenges of life is the key to achieving anything you set your mind to. While the external world may seem beautiful, the inner light within you truly illuminates your path. Embrace positivity and strive for success.

While the worries and pressures of being a student or working professional may consume our thoughts, it is important to recognize that the real journey begins after graduation. This is when we assume greater responsibilities, such as building a career, starting a family, and working hard to prosper. Throughout all the failures and upsets we encounter, it is crucial to remember that every sunset signifies the promise of a new sunrise.

Remember, your past failures serve as valuable lessons, guiding you toward personal growth and resilience. The present is an opportunity to learn from those lessons and work towards self-improvement. As you continue your journey, never lose sight of the remarkable achievements that await you in the future. Believe in yourself, embrace positivity, and let your light shine brightly, inspiring others along the way.



Leading BAQRIX as lecturer and mentor in DHA Suffa (2017-19)



Daejeon being Champions for Inter Korea Cricket Tournament / leading Muslim Community in KAIST / With Korea Foreign Minister, His Excellency Park Jin for MOFA invitation to Ramadan Fasting