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# Academic success - explanatory theories

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## Abstract

The successful professional integration of higher education graduates is closely linked to the quality of students' training during their university studies and their motivation to engage in the process of training and developing professional and transversal competences. Academic success can be defined either in terms of the high academic achievement of a well-established academic pathway or by reference to the extent of academic results achieved during training, during university studies and in line with training requirements. Definitions of academic success differ, due to different perspectives of analysis. Approaching academic success from an analytical perspective integrates categories of factors that explain academic success as a process. The present article aims to present a register of factors influencing academic success and to explain their influence on student personality and successful academic career shaping. Categories of factors related to the internal and external learning environment were considered, such as personal/individual, social, economic, cultural, educational and psychological. Academic success among students is moreover explained by reference to the management of learning activities implemented by students and aspects related to the flexibility dimension of learning in the academic space, with positive implications on it. Academic success is also explained by considering academic standards and the achievement of these standards as a measure of assessment. The philosophy of defining academic success identifies the concept as being a relative one. In this sense, student satisfaction with one's own academic performance can integrate academic success. From an academic perspective, high academic achievement, objectively measured, characterises academic success.

**Keywords:** *academic success, quality, indicators, university education, student*

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## Introduction

Academic training integrates educational practices that contribute to the formation and development of professional and transversal competences in line with the specialisation profile. The quality of student training is closely linked to a number of aspects related to: the high level of specialisation of the teacher-trainer, his/her psycho-social and pedagogical skills, the conditions of implementation of the teaching process, the quality of the training process, the objective measurement of learning outcomes, the students' response to the importance attached to their training, the employers' response to their expectations of training (Matei, 2022). Universities accredited as higher adult education institutions implement actions aimed at meeting the training requirements of future professionals. The quality dimension in university education is analysed and described in the context of considerating the following aspects: the training of professionals who are capable of integrating into the labour market, the training in accordance with the requirements of specialisation in a given field, the academic training approaches based on respect for the principles and values of education, the training and development of transversal competences, the consideration and valorisation of curricular components that support the achievement of final results, the construction and instrumentation of an assessment framework with clear criteria and performance standards, the individualisation of learning, the belief that all students can be academically successful ( Linca, Matei, 2023)

## Quality in university education - a precursor to academic success.

In the knowledge-based society, education places the discourse on the need for quality, a perspective widely referred to in education policies in many countries of the world. The 2015 UN Summit marked the design and adoption by participating countries of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the goal "Quality Education". The concept of "quality in education" is operationalised in the context of a series of indicators describing: the quality of the learning environment, the quality of the learning process, the quality of training and research. The explanation of "quality in university education" relates to the academic success achieved in situations of

improving the teaching process, optimising the conditions of learning. The aim is to improve the conduct of the programme, to make more efficient the communication in the academic environment and to strengthen the institutional culture by respecting the principles and rules of ethics and academic integrity. Learning outcomes are a measure of quality in education. We define "learning outcomes" as the competences acquired by learners after completing training programmes in the context of the triad of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Quality in higher education is closely linked to the expectations of the beneficiaries and to meeting quality standards. Quality assessment in higher education integrates the fulfilment by higher education institutions of standards and benchmarks set against certain criteria for educational achievement. The perspectives of analysis on quality assessment in university education (for the case of Romania according to ARACIS standards - Romanian Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education), cover the following areas of assessment: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness and quality management. Each area under evaluation is described by specific criteria which are in turn measured by a series of indicators. For the area of "institutional capacity" the assessment of quality in education considers the following aspects: institutional, administrative and managerial structures (mission, objectives and stated learning outcomes, academic integrity, public accountability and responsibility, regulations of how the university conducts its business, financial budget in line with average tuition costs per academic year, availability and capacity of teaching and research spaces, facilities, quality of teaching staff in terms of preparation and training, availability of auxiliary teaching staff). The following quality indicators are considered for the domain ,,Educational effectiveness": student admission based exclusively on the candidate's academic skills, curriculum designed in accordance with new perspectives of scientific development, applied curriculum based on teaching strategies that encourage the use of digital resources, teamwork, cultivation of values, curriculum structured by disciplines corresponding to the fields of specialization, curriculum construction in line with European and global trends in education), student and

graduate promotability, rate of labour market integration of graduates, level of student satisfaction in relation to professional and personal development, student-centred learning methods, scientific research activity. For the field ,,quality management", quality standards are the following: organisational structures responsible for quality monitoring, transparent regulations and procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching performance of the professors by the students, evaluation of teaching staff by management, accessibility of learning resources, information management. Academic success can be explained in the context of the "quality in university education" dimension.

## Review of the literature

The literature highlights concerns about defining "academic success" in terms of indicators of academic performance. Some researchers have examined the concept from a structural perspective, an academic construct based on consideration of test scores (Weatherton & Schussler, 2022). Other authors have defined academic success by analyzing other types of variables such as: student interest in a discipline or a particular field of study (Rowland A., et. al. 2019, (Schiefele, 1991), a result of achieving academic goals related to training, academic achievement, performance (Kuh & et. al, 2006).

Academic success integrates academic parktics that support high-level achievement. Other researchers examine academic success in relation to the length of study from matriculation to graduation (Gilmore, Wofford, & Maher, 2016, Matheka, Jansen, & Hofman, 2020). Other researchers have analyzed and highlighted academic success by analyzing factors that influence it, such as cultural norms and family expectations (Oh & Kim, 2016). Other authors believe that a number of personal factors underlie success such as: clear goal setting and intrinsic motivation (Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. 2002), effective planning and time management (Covey, S. R. (1989, Allen, D. (2001), effective learning (Brown, P. C., Roediger III, H. L., & McDaniel, M. A., 2014), certain types of social behaviors such as communication and collaboration influence success, adaptability and resilience (Duckworth, A., 2016, Anghel et. al, 2022).

## Theories explaining academic success

The concept of "success" is associated with favourable results obtained from an action that has the effect of increasing an individual's satisfaction with his or her own performance. "Success" is an attribute of actions designed to produce satisfaction in the context of achieving predetermined goals. Success is associated with: success, achievement, performance obtained by a person or a group and recognized as such by the collectivity (Popescu, 1998, p.619). Based on these definitional projections, academic success is associated with students' academic achievement and performance. The variables ,,academic success" and ,,academic performance" can be operationalized as follows: accomplishment of academic tasks under well-established conditions, achievement of goals, superior evaluations of academic results, academic social recognition, and academic rewards. Academic success can be explained from several perspectives: psychological, social, cultural and economic. In the following lines we will outline some of the theories that explain academic success.

***Motivation theory*** which explains that at the core of academic success is the intrinsic motivation of the student (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. 1985). Passion for learning, identification of meaning and enjoyment of learning for self-improvement stimulates the student's involvement and responsibility for their own education.

***Resilience theory*** focuses on an individual's ability to overcome obstacles and cope with failure. Werner and Smith (1992) studied children who succeeded despite difficult circumstances and identified characteristics such as adaptability and social support as key factors.

***Social Theory of Learning***: In the context of social perspectives on learning, as developed by Bandura, they argue that academic success is influenced by social interaction and collaboration. Cognitive development is fostered particularly through active participation in groups and interaction with other members of the academic community.

***Self-determination theory*** proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that academic success is linked to the satisfaction of the individual's fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence and social connectedness. When these needs are met, students are more motivated and more likely to achieve academic success.

***Cognitive-Emotional Self-Regulation Theory.*** Zimmerman (2002) developed the theory of cognitive-emotional self-regulation, suggesting that students who are able to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are more likely to achieve academic success

***Multiple Intelligences Theory.*** Gardner (1983) proposed the theory of multiple intelligences, arguing that there are many types of intelligence and that academic success should not be measured solely by performance in particular areas. This perspective encourages the assessment of students' diverse abilities.

***Theory of Stigma and Stereotypes.*** Steele and Aronson (1995) explored the impact of stigma and stereotyping on academic performance, highlighting the concept of 'stereotype threat'. They argue that these elements can negatively affect the performance of students from minority groups.

***Self-Efficacy Theory.*** Proposed by Albert Bandura (1977), this theory focuses on students' personal beliefs about their own ability to succeed at specific tasks. Belief in one's own abilities influences motivation and academic performance.

***Constructivist theory.*** Proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), this theory emphasises the role of social interaction in the construction of knowledge. Ideas and content are better understood and retained when they are discussed and learned in a social context.

## Conclusions

Intrinsic motivation can play an important role in academic performance. Successful students are often those who are committed to learning and who manage their time effectively. They are disciplined in achieving their academic goals and avoid procrastination. Adopting personalized academic instructional practices can facilitate academic success. Academic success is greatly influenced by learning strategies, time allocation for study, access to learning resources, and the quality of the learning environment.

Academic success is influenced by social and group factors such as: peer group influence, peer group affiliation, family, proffesors community and the relationship between the student and these structures. Effective management of educational crisis situations and effective stress management successfully contributes to maintaining a healthy balance between academic and personal life, which positively influences academic performance. Flexibility and adaptability to the conditions of the academic environment are variables that influence academic success and performance.

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