

# School Success Between Expectations and Achievement

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**ABSTRACT:** School success is the goal of many students and parents. This paper aims to study the issue of school success in terms of expectations and academic achievement and is structured in two parts. The first part deals with aspects of school success and addresses topics such as school performance, school success, school failure, school evaluation, and motivational factors. School performance, understood as the result of all student activities and expressed through grades, is different from school achievement, which is oriented towards its value. Academic achievement depends on motivational factors, the influence and involvement of parents in the school life of the student, how the student relates to the environment, and educational influences. The second part of the paper addresses the issue of students' and parents' expectations regarding academic results. Differences or similarities between these expectations can lead to school success and academic achievement. The expectation-value theory highlights the catalytic effect of expectations, as well as the reciprocity of the relationship between parents' expectations and students' academic achievement.

**KEYWORDS:** school performance, school success, school failure, evaluation, motivation, expectations, achievement

## **Introduction**

School performance is an important landmark of a person's overall achievement throughout life. School trajectory, future career, socio-professional status, income level, quality of life represents just some of the aspects of life that can be determined by school performance and academic achievement. Although school results do not define the person as such, they play an important role in developing personality, self-confidence, and relating to the individual in society. School success can be determined by many factors, including motivation, socioeconomic status, family environment, students' expectations, as well as parents' expectations regarding their school results.

In addition to influencing students' academic expectations, parents' expectations can also influence their academic achievement. For example, Aldous (2006) found that adolescents' academic achievement was high when parents and adolescents had high levels of academic expectations.

## **Aspects of school success**

To better understand the aspects that characterize school success, some elements such as school performance compared to school success, factors that can lead to school success or failure, how to evaluate school results, factors that stimulate learning motivation in school must be considered. Sometimes parents' expectations do not match students' expectations concerning academic achievement. Differences or similarities between these expectations can also determine academic achievement.

## ***School performance***

Performance is the result of all activities and responses of the subject, the product of experience and learning under the guidance of the teacher. School performance is expressed by the performance index, respectively by grades, and has a strong motivational effect. It

intensifies and supports the learning effort, stimulates the establishment of a high level of performance, and inspires satisfaction in the development of the experience. The most important factor in determining the need for performance is the performance itself. Positive performances tend to increase the efficiency of learning, while failure determines its diminution (Lazăr 1975).

School performance results from the instructive and stimulating management of learning in groups and classes or from the interactions established between student and teacher in certain social conditions. The main categories of factors that determine school performance are those related to the school environment, the social environment pedagogically assimilated in school, and the social environment internalized individually. The school environment is highlighted by the characteristics of the school units, the components of the training model, the pedagogical ethos of the teachers, the student's motivation for learning; the pedagogically assimilated social environment consists in combining the aspects related to the material basis of the school, the integration of education with research, the socio-moral climate in the school, the selection criteria of the students integrated into certain types of schools; the individual internalized social environment refers to the environment of social and family origin of the student, the parent's interest in the school, the student's conception of himself. The three categories of factors influence or determine the level of school performance both at the school and personal level, of each student (Jinga et al. 1989).

According to Bayrak and Köksal (2017), if parents are aware of how important preschool education is, these institutions meet expectations, proving to be places where the child acquires and develops skills to support him to learn in the following years, establishes relationships with others and develops social skills to interact with the social environment.

The importance that the family attaches to children's education and efforts directed towards school can be a predictor of school performance. Weisner and Garnier's (1992) longitudinal study of conventional, unconventional, and cross-cultural families indicated that various value commitments "protect" children from threats such as marital instability, which may otherwise reduce academic achievement. Weisner and Garnier concluded that families who reported sustainable, consistent, and meaningful values were more likely to maintain a home-friendly environment for children's academic development (Weisner and Garnier 1992).

### ***School success***

School results and student adaptation are influenced by many people, processes, and institutions. Parents, extended family, peer groups, neighbors, school groups, and other institutions (eg churches, clubs) are involved in shaping children's progress towards their personal and social fulfillment. Children themselves, with their unique abilities, temperaments, and inclinations, play a central role in shaping and reforming their behavior, aspirations, and achievements. The family size, structure, income, and employment model are influential factors for educational achievements and personal adaptation. These processes will be influenced by a wide range of other factors and, at the same time, will operate through a series of interconnected processes (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

School success is seen from two perspectives: the need for success and the orientation towards the values of success. While the upper and middle classes are dominated by the spirit of competition and volunteering, the desire to succeed, and the taste for effort, the lower classes are characterized by passivity and fatalism. These attitudes are due to the temporal vision of these categories: the first is oriented towards the future, willing to sacrifice the present to achieve success, managing time efficiently, and the second is oriented towards satisfying immediate needs and desires. So, school success is differentiated according to the socio-economic class of the parents: those who belong to upper or middle social classes value school success as a means of social ascension, orienting children's aspirations to social and

higher school levels, and those in the classes rather, they transmit a failure-oriented attitude (Stănciulescu 1997).

Some researchers believe that one of the most important conditions for school success is the mother's affection. Therefore, maternal rejection or absence of affection negatively influences both school achievement and long-term outcomes (Epstein 1983). However, the affection-success relationship is not automatic, it is not always valid. Thus, the maternal condition can lead to school failure if it is associated with the permissiveness of mothers towards school activity. The dependence of performance on the maternal condition varies depending on the child gender: if for boys the affectivity leads to positive school results, in the case of girls, the more help and affection they receive, the lower the results. On the other hand, ethnicity is a determining factor in the emergence of school performance, so that girls' school success is directly proportional to maternal affectivity in black or Latino families, while in Asian families this ratio is inefficient (Stănciulescu 1997).

### ***Success vs. school failure***

The notion of school failure is viewed differently in many countries around the world. If in some EU countries the term school failure does not exist, but only takes the form of not realizing the individual potential of the student (England, Wales, Ireland), in other countries failure is understood as an imbalance between students' skills, natural abilities and prof obtained (Denmark), unqualified exit from the education system (France), dropout rate or illiteracy (Greece), the inability of students to achieve defined objectives (Portugal, Spain, Belgium), the inability of the student to acquire basic knowledge (Italy), repetition rate and dropout (Germany). Therefore, school failure is "the inability of the education system to achieve true equality of opportunity, (...) the difficulty of combining the aspiration of a quality education with a sufficient level of education for each, ensuring participation in social life" (Eurydice 1996, 55-58).

Studies have shown that students who started school after completing preschool education were more involved, open, and able to adapt to school activities and achieved better academic results than other students (Kaiser and Bauer 2017; Manigo and Allison 2017; Duncan and Magnuson 2013). It is clear that the first years are of crucial importance in individual development, are real support for the development of the individual during this period, and have positive effects on academic success, school performance, and social life in the future.

Parents play an important role in promoting academic success by involving in their children's schoolwork, stimulating cognitive growth at home, and promoting values in accordance with academic achievement. The parent's involvement in the children's academic and school activity is related to the reduction of behavioral problems and academic achievements over time (Hill et al. 2004). In adolescence, low academic achievement is associated with a variety of health risk behaviors, including substance abuse, adolescent sexual activity, depression, and violence. Given the link between parental competence and student success, it would seem plausible that interventions targeting family management skills reduce problematic behavior and increase academic performance (Stormshak et al. 2009).

To prevent school failure, there are several types of interventions, such as early preschool and as a complement to education and family life, partnerships between schools, local associations, social workers, businesses, collaboration with family, training, and development of pedagogical skills of the teaching staff, improving, and adapting school management to the specific needs of the local community, school, and professional guidance (Eurydice 1996).

Some studies have shown that students who encounter school difficulties are not necessarily among those who have poor school attendance or behavioral disorders, but those who are affected by previous school failures and feel this as a personal failure in terms of

their assertion in the community. Affective failure can take the form of disinterest, negative reactivity, refusal, or opposition to school or family requirements, as well as anxiety, insecurity, self-doubt, or imbalance between student interests and outcomes, or inconsistencies in school activities (Radulian 1967).

### ***Evaluation of school results***

One cannot talk about performance, success, or school failure without a system for evaluating them. The evaluation of an object, in general, aims to estimate its value, the degree of compliance with the ideal norm. In education, the notion of evaluation represents an association of the real (the student's knowledge) with the ideal (the standard value), of the ethic (what is worth estimating) with the desirable (what is desirable) (Manolescu 2008).

Evaluation is a complex process of pedagogical actions through which: the achievement of the proposed objectives about a norm is measured and assessed with the help of criteria; a grade is assigned to the student's performance; the degree of correspondence between a set of information on student learning and a set of criteria related to a specific objective is examined to make a decision; a judgment is issued; it is estimated; is checked; a verdict is given (Manolescu & Panțuru, 2008).

By providing feedback after assessment, students can gain self-confidence, develop an active learning style, based on conscious and voluntary choice of learning strategies, and gain motivation for future success (Stoica, 2003). The pedagogical purpose of the assessment is to provide an answer concerning the students' knowledge level. The answer given by evaluation must be argued, to ensure a clear justification of the assessment made by the teacher of students' works (Cucuș 2014).

The effects of evaluation are reflected in three major areas: training, learning, and the needs of society. Evaluation is useful for both teachers and students and society: teachers can use the results of the evaluation to improve training activities, by continuous comparison with training objectives; students will experience positive changes in school behavior, and society will certify the level of training and skills acquired (Telleri 2003).

### ***Motivation in learning***

The problem of motivation in learning has been approached by many specialists and several theories have emerged, of which the best known are the theory of attribution, the theory of goals, and the theory of self-determination. The attribution theory proposed by Weiner (in Gherasim and Butnaru 2013) is based on the fact that the individual attributes the failure or success of his actions or personal qualities. So, he tries to understand himself to know himself better, to regulate his behavior, and to choose the course of his actions. Goal theory consists of a set of ideas relevant to understanding academic motivation, formulated, and tested by several authors. Within this theory, there are two categories of goals that people often associate with achieving the desired results: performance/skill goals and mastery/learning goals (Negovan and Tomșa 2017).

To analyze the motivational process, the first step is to observe the context in which the learning takes place and the situations in which the student is placed. Viau (2004) suggests that school motivation is generated by the student's perceptions about himself and the environment in which he learns, including teachers, school subjects, teaching tasks. Weiner (1992), on the other hand, considers that school success or failure depends on the subjective model in which students explain these phenomena, and which are related to the intensity of the emotions that accompany them. The effects of negative emotions can influence the student's attitude and confidence in himself and school.

Effective training can occur only through the positive response to learning outcomes, through reward you achieve success and achievement. Thus, instruction must be based on obtaining the student's intrinsic motivation and learning satisfaction (Jinga et al. 1989).

One of the main motivating factors is the family from the perspective of the socio-economic situation, the affective-emotional-intellectual support, and the values of the family. Although a modest financial situation may be an obstacle to maintaining the motivation to learn, an exceptionally good financial situation does not have to be a positive guarantee in this regard. In situations where parents can support their children in doing homework, this will be an advantage in favor of stimulating and maintaining students' motivation (Sălăvăstru 2004).

### **Expectations and achievement**

The key context for assessing the parents' impact on students' school results is at home. Depending on the age or level of child development, parents can also ensure the acquisition of skills (for example, the basics of literacy and calculation through puns and numbers). These skills could also help children with special needs. Throughout the school years, parental involvement seems to have a major impact on children by shaping values and expectations, by encouraging, interest and respect for the learning child. It seems that students internalize aspects of parental values and expectations as they form an image of themselves as learners. These influences are interpreted through discussions about and beyond the educational process. All aspects of these exchanges can be improved through learning (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

#### ***Students' expectations regarding school results***

Due to their important effects on academic achievement, the academic expectations of adolescents have been widely studied in the field of adolescent development. To conceptualize the formation of adolescents' academic expectations, especially the impact of past academic achievements and the social context on adolescents' academic expectations, Wigfield and Eccles (2002, 91-120) developed the „expectation-value” theory of motivation for achievement. The theory states that adolescents' expectations and values are influenced by their social context (parents, teachers, colleagues, neighbors, and community) and previous academic achievements. Once the expectations and values of the individual are established, they influence the academic performance, perseverance, and choice of the academic subject. In other words, the theory presents causal relationships between the social context (for example, parents' expectations), their expectations, and academic achievement.

Rosen and Aneshensel (1978) noted that although the academic expectations of boys and girls were influenced by the perception of parents' expectations, the effects of parents' expectations were greater between mothers and daughters than between fathers and sons. Another study found that girls are more sensitive to parental expectations than boys (Flouri and Hawkes 2008).

#### ***The expectation-value theory***

The expectation-value theory is useful to explain not only how parental expectations influence adolescents' expectations and achievement, but also how parental expectations are developed (Wigfield and Eccles 2002, 91-120). Several studies have suggested that the relationship between parental expectations and adolescent achievement is reciprocal. For example, in an analysis involving longitudinal path models, Mistry et al. (2009) found that the parents' and teachers' expectations are dynamic and receptive to the adolescents' achievement and performance over time.

In support of the „expectation-value” theory, several researchers have demonstrated the importance of parents' academic expectations in shaping their children's academic expectations (Bandura et al. 1996, Goyette and Xie 1999, Smith 1981). For example, Bandura et al. (1996) found that children whose parents had high academic aspirations generally had higher academic self-efficacy compared to children whose parents did not. Smith (1981)

found that both maternal and paternal academic expectations were significantly associated with adolescents' expectations and that the association was stronger for mothers' academic expectations than for fathers' expectations. Parents' academic expectations were also positively associated with adolescents' academic expectations in a sample of young immigrants (Aldous 2006). Thus, parents' expectations categorically influence the formation of adolescents' academic expectations.

Although expectation-value theory suggests that, in addition to previous levels of students' academic achievement, certain cultural stereotypes, such as gender and/or racial or ethnic roles, may influence parents' expectations, the empirical evidence for these statements remains uncertain (Wigfield and Eccles 2002, 91–120).

### ***Parents' expectations regarding school results***

One of the aspects with a great influence on school success is the family „ambitions” in the school field (Radulian 1967, 37).

Some research has shown that parents' expectations and beliefs about their children's learning are closely related to children's beliefs about their skills, as well as their achievement (Galper et al. 1997, in Samal 2012). Parents who were actively involved in various school activities had children who demonstrated greater social competence than the children of parents with lower levels of school contact. It was hypothesized that home involvement would be most strongly associated with positive classroom learning outcomes and that direct involvement in school would predict lower levels of behavior problems. Involvement activities at home, such as reading with the child at home, arranging a favorable environment for educational activities, and maintaining dialogue with the child about school activities, highlighted the strongest relationships with subsequent school skills.

The results of the research of Zhang et al. (2011) indicated that there is a reciprocal relationship between parents' expectations and adolescents' expectations (ie they had a mutual influence on each other). Moreover, there was a reciprocal relationship between expectations (of both parents and adolescents) and the academic achievement of adolescents. Gender and ethnicity analysis showed that the effects of parental expectations on students' expectations were stronger in men than in women. In terms of ethnic differences, the effects of adolescents' expectations were weaker than the expectations of African American parents compared to other ethnic groups (ie, Asian, Hispanic, and white).

A study by Goldenberg et al. (2001) examined the reciprocal relationship between parents' expectations and students' school performance in a sample of Latino families. The results of the study indicated that students' school performance influenced parents' expectations, but on the other hand (Benner and Mistry 2007, Goyette and Xie 1999), parents' expectations did not influence performance. In short, there is much empirical evidence to suggest that not only parents' expectations influence students' expectations and achievements, but also that achievement can influence parents' expectations.

Moreover, a study by Benner and Mistry (2007) tested the mechanisms by which the educational expectations of parents and teachers affect the academic achievement of adolescents. Their findings suggested that both parents' and teachers' expectations influenced young people's academic performance. Thus, high expectations of parents mitigated the negative effects of low expectations of teachers. The perception of parents' expectations (rather than the expectations themselves) can also positively influence adolescents' academic achievements. However, discrepancies between students' expectations and their perceptions of parents' expectations can lead to negative outcomes.

In their study of a diverse ethnic sample, Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) found that adolescents who perceived that their parents had similar expectations to their own, tended to perform well academically. On the other hand, when a mismatch between students' and parents' expectations was perceived, students' academic performance suffered.

The results of research conducted by Dobson (1993) show that the first 18 months of life are crucial for intellectual development, and the strongest influence on children is the mother. Linguistic, intellectual, socio-affective skills are significantly influenced by direct contact with the child (verbal, visual, tactile, emotional). One of the inhibitory factors of the child's development is the limitation of the child's movement in a small space. Biparental families have a more positive influence on the child's development than single-parent families.

## Conclusions

Family involvement is the strongest predictor of a child's educational outcomes. This dimension was significantly associated with children's motivation to learn, attention, the persistence of tasks, receptive vocabulary skills, and low behavioral problems. Family involvement in education has been identified as a beneficial factor in the learning of young children. Therefore, it is a key component of national educational policies and programs for early childhood (Samal 2012).

Parental involvement in children's school life has a significant impact on children's development and education and has benefits for all stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, and the community. However, many cultural, psychological, and social barriers can prevent or diminish these positive effects. An especially important role in restoring a fruitful relationship is played by the educational counseling services through the psycho-pedagogical assistance centers (Institute of Educational Sciences).

Hountenville and Conway (2008) confirmed that the more parents become involved in school activities in a sustained way in decision-making, supervisory, volunteer, para-professional, and home-based roles, the better for the academic achievement of students. They also proved that better academic results belong to students from families where there are daily routines, who monitor their children's extracurricular activities, shape the value of learning, self-discipline, and sustained work, express high but realistic expectations of achievement, show interest in children's progress by helping or checking homework, discuss the value of a good education and possible career options, and also stay in touch with children, teachers, and school staff.

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