Psychological Variables Predicting Academic Achievement in Argentinian Students: Scales Development and Recent Findings

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Abstract : Academic achievement in high school and college students is currently a matter of concern. National and international assessments show high schoolers as low achievers, and local statistics indicate alarming dropout percentages in this educational level. Even so, 80% of those students intend attending higher education. On the other hand, applications to Public National Universities are free and non-selective by examination procedures. Though initial registrations are massive (307.894 students), only 50% of freshmen pass their first year classes, and 23% achieves a degree. Low performances use to be a common problem. Hence, freshmen adaptation, their adjustment, dropout and low academic achievement arise as topics of agenda. Besides, the hinge between high school and college must be examined in depth, in order to get an integrated and successful path from one educational stratum to the other. Psychology aims at developing two main research lines to analyse the situation. One regarding psychometric scales, designing and/or adapting tests, examining their technical properties and their theoretical validity (e.g., academic motivation, learning strategies, learning styles, coping, perceived social support, parenting styles and parental consistency, paradoxical personality as correlated to creative skills, psychopathological symptomatology). The second research line emphasizes relationships within the variables measured by the former scales, facing the formulation and testing of predictive models of academic achievement, establishing differences by sex, age, educational level (high school vs college), and career. Pursuing these goals, several studies were carried out in recent years, reporting findings and producing assessment technology useful to detect students academically at risk as well as good achievers. Multiple samples were analysed totalizing more than 3500 participants (2500 from college and 1000 from high school), including descriptive, correlational, group differences and explicative designs. A brief on the most relevant results is presented. Providing information to design specific interventions according to every learner's features and his/her educational environment comes up as a mid-term accomplishment. Furthermore, that information might be helpful to adapt curricula by career, as well as for implementing special didactic strategies differentiated by sex and personal characteristics.

Keywords : academic achievement, higher education, high school, psychological assessment
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