CZU: 159.947.5:37.017-057.87 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(195)2026_59**

PERFORMANCE MOTIVATION AS A PREDICTIVE FACTOR OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

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The article presents the relationship between performance motivation and students' academic engagement, analyzing to what extent motivational factors can explain differences in students' behavioral, cognitive, and emotional involvement in university activities. The results of the correlational analysis highlighted positive and significant relationships between the dimensions of academic engagement and the components of performance motivation, especially success certainty, desire to learn, internality, cognitive flexibility, and compensatory effort. Behavioral engagement was mainly associated with internality, desire to learn, and success certainty, cognitive engagement with success certainty, desire to learn, cognitive flexibility, and internality, and emotional engagement with compensatory effort, success certainty, and desire to learn. Regression analysis indicated that performance motivation explains approximately 28% of the variation in academic engagement, with the total motivational index being a significant positive predictor of academic engagement. The results highlight the central role of motivational factors in supporting students' academic engagement and their adaptation to the university environment.

Keywords*: performance motivation, behavioral academic engagement, cognitive academic engagement, emotional academic engagement.*

MOTIVAȚIA PERFORMANȚEI CA FACTOR PREDICTIV AL IMPLICĂRII ACADEMICE A STUDENȚILOR

Articolul prezintă relația dintre motivația performanței și implicarea academică a studenților, analizând în ce măsură factorii motivaționali pot explica diferențele în implicarea comportamentală, cognitivă și emoțională a studenților în activitățile universitare. Rezultatele analizei corelaționale au evidențiat relații pozitive și semnificative între dimensiunile implicării academice și componentele motivației performanței, în special certitudinea succesului, dorința de a învăța, internalitatea, flexibilitatea cognitivă și efortul compensatoriu. Implicarea comportamentală a fost asociată în principal cu internalitatea, dorința de a învăța și certitudinea succesului, implicarea cognitivă cu certitudinea succesului, dorința de a învăța, flexibilitatea cognitivă și internalitatea, iar implicarea emoțională cu efortul compensatoriu, certitudinea succesului și dorința de a învăța. Analiza de regresie a indicat că motivația performanței explică aproximativ 28% din variația implicării academice, indicele motivațional total fiind un predictor pozitiv semnificativ al implicării academice. Rezultatele evidențiază rolul central al factorilor motivaționali în susținerea implicării academice a studenților și adaptarea acestora la mediul universitar.

Cuvinte-cheie*: motivația performanței, implicare academică comportamentală, implicare academică cognitivă, implicare academică emoțională.*

Introduction

One of the most acute and complex challenges currently facing education systems globally is maintaining a constant level of academic engagement, both among students and among pupils [6]. The difficulty of maintaining the coherence of academic engagement has become all the more visible in periods of transition to new education formats, especially those involving the virtual and online environment, respectively alternative methods and complementary aspects to the traditional teaching method. These have been widely adopted especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequently becoming an integral part of education systems [18].

Globally, the pandemic has acted as a catalyst for significant educational transformations, causing profound and rapid changes in the way the educational process is organized, conducted and perceived, with the impact being felt strongly and in a relatively similar manner in various regions of the world. During these major educational transformations, the perception of academic engagement has been directly influenced

by the context of the health crisis. Higher education institutions, along with other forms of education, have been forced to adopt, in a very limited time frame, new teaching and assessment methods, often extremely different from traditional ones. Also, strategies for managing educational interactions have changed to meet the new requirements generated by the conditions imposed by distance learning [15].

Inevitably, all these transformations have affected not only the quality and efficiency of educational interactions, but also the psychological well-being of all those involved in the educational process: teachers, students and the entire academic community. Although the pandemic period, which generated major changes in the conduct of academic activity, has been overcome, the elements imposed by the adaptation to it have been preserved even after the resumption of the traditional learning process, as alternatives and complementary models: hybrid or exclusively online education.

Thus, adapting to a less predictable and much less interactive educational environment has generated challenges related to academic involvement, motivation for performance, stress management, maintaining social cohesion, cultivating a sense of belonging to the university community [2].

In this context, students' academic engagement becomes not only a variable of theoretical interest, but also an essential indicator for understanding contemporary educational systems, for identifying strategies to support motivation for performance and academic engagement in times of crisis accompanied by accelerated changes.

The relationship between performance motivation and students' academic engagement

The specialized literature indicates that academic engagement is an essential component of the contemporary educational process, playing a decisive role in structuring learning experiences, in consolidating academic performance and in preventing the phenomenon of university dropout.

Numerous studies in the field of educational psychology consistently highlight the fact that a high level of academic engagement exerts direct, significant and visible effects on university performance, constituting a determining factor for the individual development of students, as well as for considerably reducing the risk of educational dropout [7, 16].

Academic engagement is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that goes beyond the simple physical participation in teaching and assessment activities, including a complex set of behaviors, attitudes, and psychological processes that reflect students' commitment to their own educational process [5]. Student academic engagement involves not only participation and attendance, but also a constant, conscious, and goal-oriented effort, manifested by assuming academic responsibilities, using effective learning strategies, and actively engaging in various knowledge-enhancing activities. Students with a high level of academic engagement tend to exhibit behaviors of active participation in classes, perseverance in the face of difficulties, increased intellectual interest, and a strategic orientation toward achieving performance.

In this context, academic engagement becomes a robust indicator of educational success, contributing decisively to reducing the dropout rate, increasing satisfaction with the educational experience, and optimizing long-term outcomes [14].

Achievement motivation is one of the most important non-cognitive predictors of academic engagement and educational success among students. In the literature, it is conceptualized as a relatively stable tendency of the individual to pursue high standards of performance, to exert sustained effort in order to achieve personal goals, and to persevere in the face of obstacles [18, 3].

Numerous studies have highlighted the fact that students with strong achievement motivation are more behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved, demonstrating active participation in the classroom, a positive affective investment in learning activities, and a strategic orientation towards the use of effective study techniques [11].

Achievement motivation contributes to the development of self-regulation in learning, in the sense that students set clear goals, monitor progress, select appropriate strategies, and adjust their learning behaviors according to academic demands [19].

Achievement Goal Theory also suggests that individuals with a growth mindset – who seek to improve their own skills, not just demonstrate performance – show higher levels of academic engagement and persistence [4].

In addition, achievement motivation is closely related to perceived self-efficacy, a factor that contributes to increased confidence and reduced anxiety in assessment situations, thus facilitating sustained engagement in complex academic tasks [1, 10].

Recent meta-analyses confirm that achievement motivation is a robust predictor of academic performance and persistence in higher education, explaining a significant proportion of the variance in academic engagement [12].

In this sense, the development of achievement motivation is an essential component of modern educational strategies, playing a central role in stimulating student engagement, optimizing academic results and consolidating their educational path.

Thus, understanding and stimulating academic engagement, as well as optimizing performance motivation, are priority objectives for teachers, psychologists, educational institutions in order to develop effective learning environments, oriented towards the long-term success of students.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the research conducted in the current context of concerns in the field of educational psychology regarding the identification of factors that contribute to the optimization of the academic experience and the increase of student performance is to investigate the role of achievement motivation, in all its aspects, as a possible predictor of academic engagement. More specifically, we focus on analyzing the relationship between performance motivation and academic engagement of students, in order to determine the extent to which the motivational variable can explain the differences that have arisen in active participation, cognitive effort and emotional investment manifested in the context of educational activities.

By examining this relationship, we aim to highlight how students' orientation towards achieving performance, the desire for self-improvement and the tendency to reach high standards of achievement can influence the degree of commitment to the learning process.

Another dimension of the research is to deepen the understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying students' academic involvement, in order to provide an integrative perspective on how performance motivation can function as a determinant of adaptive educational behaviors.

The results of the present research may have important practical implications for the development of educational and psychopedagogical strategies aimed at increasing motivation and strengthening academic commitment, thus contributing to improving academic performance and reducing the risk of university dropout.

Measurement instruments

To conduct the research, scientifically validated psychometric instruments were used, selected to cover the main variables targeted in the study: motivation for achievement and academic engagement. The choice of these instruments was based on their validity and reliability, as well as their recognition in the specialized literature.

1. *Achievement Motivation Inventory (AMI)*

Used to assess achievement-oriented motivation, this questionnaire was developed by Schuler, Thornton, and Frintrup and is a well-established instrument in applied psychological research. The AMI consists of 17 scales, each addressing a specific dimension of achievement motivation (such as perseverance, recognition desire, goal orientation, ambition), and also provides a global motivational index, reflecting the general level of motivation. The instrument contains 170 items, which allows for a nuanced and comprehensive assessment of the targeted construct [13].

2. *University Student Academic Engagement Scale (USAES)*

Recently developed in 2023 by Parra-Pérez and his collaborators, the USAES scale is intended to assess academic engagement among students. The instrument is composed of 14 items and provides both a global measure of academic involvement and a differentiated assessment on three essential dimensions: behavioral (reflecting effort and active participation), emotional (related to attitudes and affective experiences towards the educational process) and cognitive (referring to the level of concentration, perseverance and orientation towards learning) [9].

The instruments applied are scientifically validated questionnaires, each addressing a fundamental dimension of the study: measuring achievement motivation and quantifying the level of academic engagement of students. By combining these instruments, the research ensures a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon studied, each questionnaire bringing a distinct and complementary contribution to the understanding of the relationship between achievement motivation and academic engagement.

Research sample

The data collection process was carried out over an extended period of nine months, with data being collected using a form that included both the questionnaires selected to measure the research variables and a section dedicated to collecting socio-demographic data, necessary for characterizing the sample. At the end of the collection stage, the responses of a total of 232 participants were centralized, all involved on a voluntary basis and in compliance with the ethical principles of research, by signing the informed consent. The substantial size of the sample provides an adequate degree of representativeness for the studied population and allows the formulation of statistically relevant conclusions. The average age of the research participants is 35 years. The frequency analysis shows that 46 respondents (19.8%) fall into the male gender category, while 186 respondents (80.2%) belong to the female gender category. Of the total respondents, 102 participants are at the first faculty (44%), 114 participants are enrolled in the second faculty (49%), constituting the largest category, and 16 (7%) participants attend the third faculty, a relatively small group, but significant through their constant involvement in education and continuing training.

For clarity of the results obtained, we present below the table containing the composition of the group of research participants (table no. 1), structured on socio-demographic details and details relevant to the research, in which we presented the numerical and percentage structure for each category.

Table 1. Presentation of general data of research participants

Socio-demographic data	Categories	Number	Percent
1. Gender aspects	Masculine gender	46	20%
	Feminine gender	186	80%
2. Age (years)	18 – 25 years	72	31%
	26 – 30 years	25	11%
	31 – 35 years	31	14%
	36 – 40 years	22	9%
	41 – 45 years	37	16%
	46 – 50 years	29	12%
	51 – 55 years	7	3%
	56 – 60 years	9	4%
3.Rank of university studies	First faculty	102	44%
	Second faculty	114	49%
	Third faculty	16	7%
4. Level of study	Bachelor	212	91%
	Master	20	9%
5. Year of study	First year	97	42%
	Second year	75	32%
	Third year	60	26%
6. Average grade of the previous year	Between 6 – 7,99	59	25%
	Between 8 – 8,99	81	35%
	Between 9-10	92	40%

Results obtained

Following the exploratory analysis of the dependent variables, it was found that most of them do not follow the normal distribution model, presenting significant deviations from the expected parameters of a normal distribution, the only exception identified was the Total Motivational Index variable, which presented statistical characteristics compatible with a normal distribution (p=0.137 in the Shapiro-Wilk normality test). For the other dependent variables, the normality tests applied revealed significant deviations, which indicates the need to use non-parametric tests to verify the research hypotheses (Speraman correlation test) [17].

Hypothesis No. 1: There are associations between performance motivation and behavioral academic engagement.

Hypothesis No. 2: There are associations between performance motivation and cognitive academic engagement.

Hypothesis No. 3: There are associations between performance motivation and emotional academic engagement.

Hypothesis No. 4: The total motivational index is a significant predictor of students' academic engagement.

The results obtained after verifying hypothesis no. 1 using the Spearman correlation test are presented in table no. 2.

Table 2. Associating behavioral academic engagement with aspects of performance motivation

Variable 1	Variable 2	Statistical significance (p)	Spearman correlation coefficient (rho)
	Perseverance	0,000	0,319
	Dominance	0,000	0,294
	Commitment	0,020	0,153
	Success Assurance	0,000	0,397
	Flexibility	0,000	0,368
Academic Behavioral Commitment	Absorption	0,059	0,124
	Fearlessness	0,000	0,300
	Internality	0,000	0,425
	Compensatory Effort	0,008	0,173
	Pride of Performance	0,000	0,340
	Desire to Learn	0,000	0,406
	Preference for Difficulty	0,000	0,273
	Independence	0,000	0,296
	Self-Control	0,000	0,319
	Status Orientation	0,002	0,199
	Competition Orientation	0,785	-0,018
	Goal Setting	0,006	0,181

The results obtained indicate that most facets of performance motivation correlate significantly with behavioral academic engagement, namely active participation in the educational process (statistical significances in the range p=0.000 and p=0.020). The exceptions are the correlations without statistical significance between behavioral academic engagement and absorption (p=0.059), competition orientation (p=0.785). The strongest correlations are between behavioral academic engagement and internality (rho = 0.425), desire to learn (rho = 0.406), certainty of success (rho = 0.397). The effect size for these correlations is large, thus *these facets have a strong association with behavioral academic engagement, confirming the role of internality, desire to learn and certainty of success in increasing behavioral academic engagement.*

The results obtained after verifying hypothesis no. 2 using the Spearman correlation test are presented in table no. 3.

Table 3. Associating cognitive academic engagement with aspects of performance motivation

Variable 1	Variable 2	Statistical significance (p)	Spearman correlation coefficient (rho)
	Perseverance	0,000	0,414
	Dominance	0,000	0,368
	Commitment	0,000	0,247
	Success Assurance	0,000	0,498
	Flexibility	0,000	0,438
	Absorption	0,049	0,130
	Fearlessness	0,001	0,211
	Internality	0,000	0,327
Academic	Compensatory Effort	0,000	0,352
Cognitive Commitment	Pride of Performance	0,000	0,380
	Desire to Learn	0,000	0,489
	Preference for Difficulty	0,000	0,409
	Independence	0,000	0,294
	Self-Control	0,000	0,348
	Status Orientation	0,000	0,357
	Competition Orientation	0,882	0,010
	Goal Setting	0,000	0,380

The results obtained highlight the fact that almost all facets of performance motivation correlate significantly with cognitive academic engagement, namely cognitive participation in the educational process (statistical significances in the range p=0.000 and p=0.049). The only exception is competition orientation (p=0.882). The strongest correlations are between cognitive academic engagement and success certainty (rho = 0.498), desire to learn (rho = 0.489), internality (rho = 0.425) and cognitive flexibility (rho = 0.438). The effect size for these correlations is large, indicating that these facets have a strong association with cognitive academic engagement, highlighting *the role of success certainty, desire to learn and cognitive flexibility in increasing cognitive academic engagement in the educational process.*

To verify the third hypothesis, we applied the Spearman correlation test, the results being presented in table no. 4.

Table 4. The association of emotional academic engagement with aspects of performance motivation

Variable 1	Variable 2	Statistical significance (p)	Spearman correlation coefficient (rho)
	Perseverance	0,001	0,221
	Dominance	0,027	0,146
	Commitment	0,000	0,237
	Success Assurance	0,000	0,362
	Flexibility	0,000	0,323
	Absorption	0,580	0,037
	Fearlessness	0,124	0,101
	Internality	0,000	0,266

Academic	Compensatory Effort	0,000	0,363
Emotional Commitment	Pride of Performance	0,000	0,307
	Desire to Learn	0,000	0,325
	Preference for Difficulty	0,000	0,267
	Independence	0,000	0,244
	Self-Control	0,000	0,252
	Status Orientation	0,000	0,230
	Competition Orientation	0,396	-0,056
	Goal Setting	0,000	0,240

The results after performing the statistical test suggest that a large part of the facets of motivation for performance correlate significantly with emotional academic commitment (statistical significances in the range p=0.000 and p=0.0027). However, there are also facets that do not correlate significantly with it, namely: absorption (p=0.580), fearlessness (p=0.124) and competition orientation (p=0.396). The strongest correlations are between emotional academic commitment and certainty of success (rho = 0.362), compensatory effort (rho = 0.363) and desire to learn (rho = 0.325). The effect size for these correlations is moderate to large, indicating that these facets have a fairly good association with emotional academic engagement, thus demonstrating that *success certainty, compensatory effort, and desire to learn play a determining role in increasing emotional academic engagement towards the educational process.*

The results obtained after verifying the last hypothesis using the linear regression test are presented in table no. 5.

Table 5. Results of the linear regression test between Total Motivational Index and Total Academic Engagement

Coefficient	Coefficient value
Constant regression coefficient (B)	1,020
Regression coefficient (B1)	0,065
Standard error (SE B)	5,573
Standardized regression coefficient (Beta)	0,530
Model coefficient (t)	9,471
Anova test significance (p)	0,000
Coefficient of determination (R^2)	0,281
Adjusted coefficient of determination (AR^2)	0,277
Anova comparison coefficient (F)	89,702
Statistical significance of the model (p)	0,000

The results showed that the regression model is significant, $p < 0.001$, and explains approximately 28% of the variation in academic engagement ($R^2 = 0.28$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.28$). The standardized regression coefficient indicates that the Total Motivational Index is a positive and significant predictor of academic engagement (Beta = 0.53, t= 9.47, $p < 0.001$). In addition, the large and significant value of F (F=89.70), confirms that the Total Motivational Index significantly explains the variation in academic engagement. These results highlight a very important result, which shows that this predictor has a clear influence on academic engagement. In our case, the regression coefficient is almost 16 times higher than its standard error (S EB=5.573) which indicates a strong and robust effect.

The p value < 0.001 indicates that the probability that this relationship is the result of chance is less than 0.1%. *We can thus state that the Total Motivational Index is a significant and strong predictor of academic engagement. The results obtained confirm the hypothesis that achievement motivation is an important*

predictor of academic engagement. Although the model explains approximately one third of the variation in academic engagement (28%), this represents a relevant proportion in psychological research, suggesting that achievement motivation plays a central, but not exclusive, role in determining the degree of commitment of students to the educational process. This fact highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation and performance orientation in supporting academic engagement.

Discussions

The analysis of the relationship between performance motivation and students' academic engagement, in order to determine the extent to which the motivational variable can explain the differences in active participation, cognitive effort and emotional investment manifested in the context of educational activities, highlighted how mainly the certainty of success, the desire to learn, cognitive flexibility, compensatory effort and internality, elements of performance motivation, can influence the degree of commitment to the learning process.

The results of the correlation analysis indicated the existence of significant positive relationships between behavioral academic engagement and the variables internality, desire to learn, and certainty of success. We also observed that cognitive academic engagement is most strongly associated with certainty of success, desire to learn, cognitive flexibility, and internality. The results of the correlation analysis also highlighted the fact that emotional academic engagement is most strongly associated with compensatory effort, certainty of success, and desire to learn.

The results of the regression analysis indicated that approximately 28% of the variance in academic engagement is determined by performance motivation. Also, the Total Motivational Index was found to be a positive and significant predictor of academic engagement, suggesting that higher levels of motivation are associated with a greater degree of academic engagement among students.

These results demonstrate that students who perceive academic results as dependent on their own actions and efforts demonstrate a higher level of active involvement in academic activities. At the same time, the desire to learn and the genuine interest in the accumulation of knowledge favor constant, cognitive and behavioral participation in educational tasks. Also, confidence in one's own chances of success contributes to maintaining a high level of behavioral, cognitive and emotional involvement, as students who perceive themselves as capable of achieving good results are more motivated to invest effort in academic activities.

The relationships highlighted by this research suggest that students who demonstrate confidence in academic success are willing to put in extra effort to overcome difficulties and show interest in the learning process, also developing a stronger emotional involvement in academic activities. Overall, the results highlight the important role of motivational factors in supporting affective attachment, as well as cognitive and behavioral involvement in the educational process.

Conclusions

Taken together, the results highlight the central role of achievement motivation in supporting the different dimensions of academic engagement – behavioral, cognitive and emotional. The observed correlations indicate that students who demonstrate confidence in their own success, genuine desire to learn, perception of personal control over outcomes – internality and cognitive flexibility tend to be more involved in academic activities both through active participation and through cognitive and emotional investment.

These findings can be explained by the fact that motivational factors influence the way students interpret academic demands and their own coping resources, determining the level of effort, perseverance and strategy invested in the learning process.

In addition, the results of the regression analysis confirm that achievement motivation is a significant predictor of academic engagement, suggesting that students with a high level of motivation are more likely to exhibit active learning behaviors, use effective cognitive strategies and develop a positive affective relationship with the educational environment.

Thus, achievement motivation can be considered an essential psychological factor that supports academic engagement and contributes to optimizing student performance and adaptation in the university environment.

Although the research was limited by the relatively small number of participants, a potential future direction of research is emerging by diversifying the sample and increasing its volume, in order to verify other aspects of the results obtained.

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Presented: 28.02.2026
Reviewed: 30.04.2026
Accepted for publication: 20.05.2026