

## Assertiveness as the predictor of university students' academic achievement

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### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the relationship between the academic success of university students and their assertiveness levels with student opinions. Descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. The study group of the research consists of 40 university students studying at various universities in Kazakhstan in the 2021–2022 academic year. The data of the study were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. As a result of the research, the vast majority of university students stated that their academic achievement and assertiveness levels are at a moderate level. In addition, the majority of university students participating in the research stated that there is a significant relationship between the level of assertiveness and the level of academic achievement. The majority of students stated that as the level of assertiveness increases, academic success will increase. In line with the results obtained from the research, it has become necessary to add courses related to assertiveness to the curriculum of the education given at universities to improve the assertiveness levels of university students.

Keywords: Assertiveness, academic achievement, university students;

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## 1. Introduction

Assertiveness, which can be defined as an individual's way of expressing himself, is accepted as one of the most important determinants in one's relationship with his environment. Assertiveness is accepted as the basis of healthy communication and includes expressing one's feelings, thoughts and wishes directly, sincerely and clearly. The behavioural feature that allows interpersonal relationships and interactions to be healthy is mostly assertive behaviour (Abakay, Alincak, & Seda, 2017). In today's education approach, which has been revealed by various researches in which there are many factors affecting academic success in education, it is thought that assertive behaviour characteristics have an effect on academic success.

### 1.1. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Although people are in constant communication for the continuation of their lives, it is of great importance that this communication be effective and healthy, which means that individuals behave respectfully, understand and feel each other. Individuals exhibit three types of behaviour while communicating. Shyness is defined as aggression and assertiveness (Mc Cabe & Timmins, 2003). Shy individuals have difficulty in expressing themselves, act shyly, fail to adequately protect their rights and thus become anxious and fragile. Aggressive individuals, on the other hand, act irritably in order to achieve their goals by keeping themselves in the foreground, do not respect the rights of the other person and so they can be hurtful and belligerent. Shyness and aggression behaviours lead to disconnections in communication. Assertiveness, which is the recommended behaviour for effective and healthy communication, includes respecting the rights of others and expressing their feelings and thoughts openly, honestly and directly (Bayraktar & Yilmaz, 2010).

Assertiveness is also considered a form of communication and can be defined as a relationship that is a way of expressing one's feelings and thoughts without violating one's rights while protecting their rights (Kamaraj, 2004). Increasing assertiveness skills of individuals at an early age can prevent children from displaying behaviours such as excessive anxiety and aggression in the later stages of their lives (Gunindi, 2013).

Children with high assertiveness focus on the solution rather than the problem (Samfira, 2020). Instead of giving up when faced with difficulties, they see them as small surmountable obstacles to be overcome (Begley & Glacken, 2004). They set realistic goals for themselves and make plans to achieve the goals; they are able to overcome the difficulties they experience in this process. Instead of worrying when faced with problem situations, they can act prudently and make healthy decisions by keeping their calm. Since they can communicate effectively with their peers and adults around them, they are successful in their social environment and at school and can adapt easily (Israel, 2007). The basis of assertiveness training is respect for the rights of others, defending one's own rights and being able to test the life of the individual in line with their decisions (Vavrichek, 2012).

Academic success is defined as the level of students reaching the intended behaviours in school life (Elci & Uzunboyu, 2020). The academic achievement of the students is used as a criterion in determining whether the desired behaviour is formed or not, and is also taken into account in areas such as university entrance and job application (Hursen & Asiksoy, 2015). It is the duty of the education system in general to measure the academic success of the students at school, to make a decision about the student based on these performance results and to direct the students to the areas where they will be successful according to their interests and abilities (Marcela, 2015).

### *1.2. Related research*

When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are many studies examining the relationship between assertiveness and social, affective and cognitive skills at different levels of education (Fuspita, Susanti, & Putri, 2018; Hadavi & Nejad, 2018; Kilic & Sevinc, 2018; Kucukkaragoz & Karakayoun, 2020; Parmaksız, 2019; Pham, Lui, & Rollock, 2020; Prema, 2022; Vagos & Pereira, 2019).

In the study of García-López and Gutiérrez (2015), assertiveness training was given to students with an average age of 12, and at the end of this training, an increase in the assertiveness levels of the students was observed. In the study of Eldeeb, Eid, and Eldosoky (2014) with second and fourth-grade nursing students, it was observed that as the age of the students increased, the level of assertiveness decreased. In this study, it was revealed that there is no relationship between the ages of the students and their assertiveness levels. In the study conducted by Pardeck et al. (1991), the effect of social work education on students' assertiveness levels was examined. No significant relationship was found between assertiveness and gender. It has been determined that age affects the level of assertiveness, and it has been found that older students tend to behave more assertively than others.

Kim (2003) stated in his research that assertiveness improves self-esteem in a positive way. It has been found that the communication skills of the individuals who were given assertiveness training improved, and their self-esteem levels and self-expression skills increased. Arslantas, Adana, and Sahbaz (2013) examined the assertiveness of high school students and found high scores of female students, those born in city centres, those with high incomes according to their expenditures, those who participated in the decision-making phase at home and those who defined themselves as aggressive and assertive. It was determined that the presence of health problems, success status, family type and number of siblings did not affect the assertiveness score average.

Tan and Aldemir (2012) investigated the factors that affect the assertiveness or shyness of adolescents in their study. It has been determined that the level of education is effective on the assertiveness of the adolescents. In addition, it was determined in the study that the ways of coping with stress of assertive and shy adolescents differ from each other. It has been determined that assertive adolescents use active planning, while shy adolescents use ways such as taking shelter in religion and emotional isolation. In addition, Eslami, Rabiei, Afzali, Hamidzadeh, and Masoudi (2016) evaluated the effect of assertiveness training on the stress, anxiety and depression levels of high school students; Deltsidou (2009) evaluated the assertiveness levels of undergraduate nursing students in Greece; and Omura, Levett-Jones, and Stone (2019) evaluated the effect of an assertiveness training programme.

### *1.3. Purpose of the research*

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the relationship between the academic success of university students and their assertiveness levels with student opinions. In this direction, the following sub-objectives have been determined:

1. How do university students evaluate their academic achievement levels?
2. How do university students evaluate their assertiveness levels?
3. Do university students think that there is a relationship between their assertiveness levels and their academic achievements?

## **2. Method and Materials**

### *2.1. Research method*

Descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. Qualitative research is defined as one of the processes of producing information to understand and evaluate people's lives, perspectives on events, behaviours and social changes. In short, in cases where we do not know the qualitative research variables, we define the variables as a result of the examinations and at the same time find the answers to the research questions. This appears to be the most appropriate and frequently used method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this direction, the relationship between the academic achievement of university students and their assertiveness levels has been discussed with descriptive analysis, one of the qualitative research methods.

### *2.2. Participants*

The study group of the research consists of 40 university students studying at various universities in Kazakhstan in the 2021–2022 academic year. Of the university students participating in the research, 14 are educated in education departments, 11 in engineering departments and 15 in health departments. 23 university students participating in the research are girls and 17 are boys. The participant group of the research was formed based on voluntary participation.

### *2.3. Data collection tools*

The data of the study were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. In the formation of the questions in the interview form prepared by the researchers, attention was paid to ensure that the questions were clear, understandable and simple. Two experts' opinions were sought in order to determine how well the prepared interview form served the purpose, its clarity and applicability. The form was rearranged as a result of the feedback of the experts. Semi-structured interview form questions were formed in accordance with the purpose and sub-purposes of the research. In the semi-structured interview form, there are two demographic questions asking about the gender and faculty information of university students and three questions about academic success and assertiveness level. Semi-structured interview questions are as follows:

1. How do you evaluate your academic success level? Rate yourself at one of the very high, high, medium, low and very low options. Write your reasons.
2. How do you evaluate your assertiveness level? Rate yourself at one of the very high, high, medium, low and very low options. Write your reasons.
3. Do you think there is a relationship between your assertiveness level and your academic success? Evaluate yourself in one of the categories very related, related, somewhat related, unrelated and very unrelated. Write your reasons.

### *2.4. Data collection process*

During the data collection phase, face-to-face interviews were conducted with university students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. The interviews lasted approximately 30–35 minutes with each university student. It took about 1 month to complete the interviews with 40 university students who formed the study group of the research.

### *2.5. Data collection analysis*

The data obtained from the semi-structured interview forms were first transferred to the Microsoft Excel programme by the researcher. The names of university students were not used in the analyses. Students' opinions were given place by coding as S1, S2, S3 .... The common views of university students were categorised by the researchers. Frequency and percentage values were determined and presented in the tables created.

### 3. Results

In Table 1, the evaluation of the university students participating in the research regarding their academic achievement levels is given.

Table 1. Opinions of university students on academic achievement levels

Category	Student opinions	F	%
Very high	S3: I am a successful student in my classes. I attribute this to my regular study and regular attendance.	4	10
	S9: I am a student who knows my responsibilities. I study regularly. I do a lot of research.		
Very high	S32: I am organised and planned. I don't leave my work to the last minute.	6	15
	S11: I only have difficulties in a lesson or two. Other than that, I find myself successful.		
	S14: I find my academic success high. I find my performance in class participation, listening and exams good.		
Middle	S40: I work by making a weekly plan. That's why I think I try to be as academically successful as I can and I find my academic success high.	21	52.5
	S4: There are classes that I like and dislike. I show high academic success in the courses I like, but unfortunately I fail in the courses I dislike. Therefore, I find my academic success moderate.		
	S17: My participation in classes is a little low. Actually, I'm good at studying, but I can't be very active in the lessons. That's why I think my performance is moderate.		
Low	S20: Sometimes I waste the time I should have devoted to the lesson. I consider myself an average student for many reasons.	5	12.5
	S1: My interest in lessons is a little low. I spend more time on my personal problems. That's why my academic achievement is low.		
Very low	S10: I cannot focus on the lessons. Therefore, my exam performances are low.	4	10
	S16: I do not feel that I belong to the department I am studying. I do not have many friends. I'm not enjoying it. That's why I can't focus on success.		
	S8: Classes and exams are very challenging for me. This strain is a major obstacle to my success.		
	S33: I am very unsuccessful. I get bored in classes. I am bored while studying.		
	S39: Even though I can't show enough interest in the lessons, I am preparing for the exams. However, I am not successful in exams because I have exam stress.		
<b>Sum</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

In Table 1, the views of university students participating in the research on their academic achievement levels are categorised. 10% of the university students rated their academic achievement levels as very high, 15% as high, 52.5% as medium, 12.5% as low and 10% as very low.

In Table 2, the evaluation of the university students participating in the research regarding the assertiveness levels is given.

Table 2. Opinions of university students on assertiveness levels

Category	Student opinions	F	%
Very high	S12: In general, my communication with people around me is very good. I approach my own problems in a solution-oriented manner. I think positively. I am a social person. I am a loved one among my friends.	1	2.5
	S22: There is an active and sociable production. I'm not a shy person. I can express myself easily.		
Very high	S13: I do not hesitate to share my thoughts with other people. I respect other people's opinions, but I don't let them rule my life.	3	7.5
	S30: I am a person who asks a lot of questions and expresses himself easily in the community. I am not a shy person.		
	S37: I can say that I am sociable from time to time. If there are many people I don't know in the community, I prefer to stay in the background.		
Middle	S15: I am more assertive among people I know. But not so much with people I've just met.	24	60
	S35: There are places where I act shy. But I can stand up for myself. I wish I was a little more assertive.		
	S2: I actually like communicating with people. But I do not have the qualifications to show leadership in the face of any event or situation		
Low	S6: For example, I avoid encountering situations in which I need to be considered. I am usually alone and on my own.	7	17.5
	S28: If the teacher asks a question in the classroom, even though I know the correct answer, I may not be able to answer it. I don't feel comfortable in public.		
	S8: I am usually alone. I don't interact with people much. I don't like to express my thoughts.		
Very low	S23: I am a very shy person. Sometimes even when I think I have been defeated, I hesitate to express it. I do not know why.	5	12.5
	S39: I am an introvert by nature. Maybe that's why I stay passive in most situations. There is some fear of misbehaving or saying the wrong thing.		
Sum		40	100

In Table 2, the evaluation of the university students participating in the research regarding the assertiveness levels is categorised. 2.5% of the university students rated their assertiveness level as very high, 7.5% as high, 60% as medium, 17.5% as low and 12.5% as very low.

In Table 3, the evaluation of university students regarding whether there is a relationship between assertiveness levels and academic achievement levels is given.

Table 3. Evaluations of university students on the relationship between assertiveness levels and academic achievement levels

Category	Student opinions	F	%
Very related	S5: In my opinion, living an active life and being able to express oneself correctly increases academic success.	3	7.5
	S18: Exhibiting assertive and assertive behaviours also creates very positive effects academically. For example, being able to ask something you do not understand without hesitation.		
	S27: Since being assertive will enable to express oneself correctly in the classroom, I see assertiveness and academic success as two highly related characteristics.		
Related	S19: Assertiveness makes the person more extrovert. I think extroverts are more successful academically.	26	65

	S34: If I could show a more active personality in the lessons, I could be a more successful student.		
	S38: Being assertive both increases success in lessons and enables group work.		
<b>Somewhat related</b>	S15: I think it has some relation. If I had been a more active person, I would have been recognised more by the instructors of the courses. I would participate more in classroom activities.		
	S24: I don't think it's very effective. However, the communication and assertiveness established with the other students in the Project activities also has an effect on the success.	5	12.5
	S25: I think it has some effect. University is a social environment. A student who is socially self-developed may be more likely to be successful.		
<b>Unrelated</b>	S9: I am not a very assertive student, but my classes are very good. That's why I find it irrelevant.		
	S26: I think academic success is more about understanding and studying the lessons.	4	10
	S32: I don't think it is possible for a student who studies and knows his/her responsibilities to be academically unsuccessful.		
<b>Very unrelated</b>	S21: I don't think he has any relationship at all. Being assertive can even have a disruptive effect on academic achievement. It may cause the student to be more social and not to spare time for the lessons.	2	5
	S29: I think shy people can also be academically successful. That's why I don't agree at all.		
<b>Sum</b>		40	100

In Table 3, the evaluation of university students participating in the research regarding the relationship between assertiveness levels and academic achievement levels is categorised. 7.5% of the university students stated that they found assertiveness and academic achievement very related, 65% as related, 12.5% as slightly related, 10% as unrelated and 5% as very unrelated.

#### 4. Discussion

The majority of university students participating in the study stated that their academic achievement levels were moderate. When researches in the field are examined, it is stated in some studies that success motivation is a strong predictor of success, perceived success and academic ability (Liao, Ferdenzi, & Edlin, 2021). In addition, the researchers found that achievement motivation was significantly associated with career choice, subjective well-being, university satisfaction, neuroticism, life goals, locus of control and learning strategies (Chodasova, Tekulová, Hľušková, & Jamrichová, 2015; Li, Lan, & Ju, 2015; Rosa & Bernardo, 2013).

The majority of university students participating in the study stated that their assertiveness level was at a moderate level. Kaya and Karaca (2018) investigated the assertiveness and trait anxiety levels of adolescents according to some variables in their research. As a result of the research, it was observed that there was a negative significant relationship between the assertiveness level of the adolescents and the level of trait anxiety. In this study, in which the assertiveness and trait anxiety levels of adolescents are examined, it is seen that the assertiveness levels of the participants are low and their trait anxiety levels are moderate.

The majority of university students participating in the study stated that there is a significant relationship between the level of assertiveness and the level of academic achievement. The majority of students stated that as the level of assertiveness increases, academic success also will increase. Sitota (2018) examined the relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation



in adolescent students. As a result of the research, adolescent students' assertiveness scores were low. It was found that the assertiveness levels of male adolescents were better than female adolescents. Regarding the relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between them.

Comedis (2014), in his research, examined the relationship between social skills and academic performance. When the relationship between social skills and academic performance was tested, it was concluded that only self-control and general social skills showed a significant relationship with academic performance. In their research, Rezayat and Nayeri (2014), in parallel with the result of this research, stated that students with assertiveness skills had fewer problems with adaptation and loneliness and were successful throughout their education. Dincyurek, Guneyli, and Caglar (2012) examined the relationship between academic achievement and assertiveness levels of university students studying at the faculty of education. In the study, unlike the results of this study, no relationship was found between pre-service teachers' assertiveness and academic achievement. In another study conducted in the field, Parray, Kumar, David, and Khare (2020) concluded that assertiveness has a very low role in predicting factors such as self-formation and academic achievement.

## **5. Conclusion**

Assertiveness is important for individuals in society to express themselves, communicate effectively and lead a quality life. It is necessary to lead a quality life for the welfare and peace of the society. Among these elements of life, having assertive personality traits is also included. Based on the idea that assertiveness affects personality traits positively, the problem of whether it is a predictor of academic success is within the scope of this study. In this direction, in this research, it was aimed to evaluate the relationship between the academic achievement of university students and the level of assertiveness with student opinions. As a result of the research, the vast majority of university students stated that their academic achievement and assertiveness levels are at a moderate level. In addition, the majority of university students participating in the research stated that there is a significant relationship between the level of assertiveness and the level of academic achievement. The majority of students stated that as the level of assertiveness increases, academic success also will increase.

## **6. Recommendations**

Based on the results of the study, the following are recommended:

1. In the education given at universities to improve the assertiveness levels of university students, courses related to assertiveness should be added to the curriculum.
2. Educational seminars and conferences should be organised within universities to increase the assertiveness of students.
3. Based on the idea that assertiveness education to be given from a young age will be more effective, course contents should be created to increase the assertiveness levels of students at all levels of education.



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