# FACTORS INFLUENCING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF SOCIAL WORK AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

# FACTORES QUE INFLUYEN EN EL RENDIMIENTO ACADÉMICO EN ESTUDIANTES DE LA LICENCIATURA EN TRABAJO SOCIAL Y DESARROLLO HUMANO

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the relationship between institutional factors and the academic performance of college students. To answer this question, we applied a non-experimental, cross-sectional design with a sample of 91 ninth semester learners from the Social Work and Human Development major. A 32 item-questionnaire, divided into three sections, was used as a research instrument and the Chi-square was employed for measuring the degree of association between variables. The results show no evidence to state the existing relationship between the academic performance and institutional factors therefore, the null hypothesis remains accepted.

**KEYWORDS**: academic performance; education; institutional factors; university students; learning

**RESUMEN**

Se realizó un estudio para conocer la relación de los factores institucionales con el desempeño académico de estudiantes universitarios. Se aplicó un diseño no experimental y transversal, en el cual participaron 91 estudiantes de noveno semestre de la Licenciatura en Trabajo Social y Desarrollo Humano. Se utilizó como instrumento un cuestionario con 32 preguntas divididas en tres apartados. Para medir el grado de asociación entre las variables se utilizó la Chi cuadrada. Los resultados señalan que no hay evidencia suficiente para afirmar que existe relación entre el desempeño académico y los factores institucionales de la dependencia a la que pertenecen los alumnos, por lo tanto, la hipótesis planteada es nula.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**: desempeño académico; educación; factores institucionales; universitarios, aprendizaje

## INTRODUCTION

Academic performance results from multiple factors influencing the learner (Rodríguez, 2024; Murillo, 2024; Coello et al., 2025). In educational terms, academic achievement can be understood as a learning outcome stimulated by the teacher's pedagogical activity and manifested in the student, although not all learning steams from instructional action (Alama & Obaco, 2024; Nuñoz, 2025; Carabalí et al., 2025). It is expressed through quantitative and qualitative grades, a mark that is consistent and valid reflects specific learning and the achievement of established objectives (Carranza, 2005; Muñoz & Solís, 2021; Trigozo et al., 2022).

Various factors are linked to academic performance, involving components both internal and external to the individual (Verdugo et al., 2023; Anchundia & Márquez, 2024). These factors, which may be social, cognitive, or emotional in nature, are classified into three categories: personal, social, and institutional determinants, each with their respective subcategories or indicators (Vargas, 2007).

All educational processes aim to enhance student achievement, underscoring the importance of considering the factors that influence it. These factors —known as determinants of academic performance— are challenging to identify; nevertheless, they must be defined to determine the influence and relevance of each within the educational process (Gómez et al., 2011). Operationally, academic performance is defined as the average grade or mark attained throughout each student´s university studies.

A wide range of factors influence academic performance, including family, economic, social, health, and nutritional variables, as well as educational elements, such as: content, teaching methods, instructors, study materials, school administration, and assessment. Academic performance offers substantial explanatory insight into the various factors at play in the learning process.

It is worth noting that learning is defined broadly enough to encompass classroom behaviors and interactions, though much learning also occurs outside school settings.

Multiple elements intersect in the classroom: academic programs, learning objectives, and an externally prescribed curriculum; teachers who structure knowledge into manageable units and present it through instructional strategies to facilitate student comprehension; and finally, the evaluation of student learning or content mastery.

Thus, what occurs in the classroom must be understood as academic performance, the outcome of assessment instruments. While this can also be termed learning given the term´s breadth, it is necessary to specify that, in this context, it refers to student scores on both standardized and non-standardized tests commonly used in schools. Therefore, this constitutes academic performance or achievement rather than learning in its broadest sense.

The concept of academic performance originated in the industrial economic paradigm. This model, as is widely recognized, directs all efforts toward enhancing the productivity and quality of workers, production methods, and services; accordingly, it employs efficiency measurement techniques by establishing objective parameters and developing performance scales, subsequently using these measurements to determine promotions, support, and recognition.

Over time, this approach to assessing efficiency, productivity, and quality extended to various social domains, including education. within the educational sphere, performance function as a criterion for rationalizing the productivity and quality of diverse inputs: processes, resources, and participants, with the ultimate goal of numerically expressing their contribution to economic and social development (Morales et al., 2016).

In the research designed to explore the relationship between institutional factors and university students´ academic achievement, the following hypothesis is proposed: «The academic performance of final-semester students in the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and Human Development at the National Autonomous University of Nuevo León (hereinafter NAUNL) is determined by the institutional factors of their faculty».

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental design, meaning that variables were observed in their natural context without manipulation.

Participants were exclusively ninth-semester students. From a total population of 169 students, a sample of 91 was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a 0.07 margin of error.

Data were collected with a questionnaire developed using Google Forms. The instrument comprised 32 items organized into three sections: students, institution, and professor, directly aligned the variables of interest.

It was used a Likert-scale format enabling students to indicate the response that best matched their opinion.

Analysis proceeded in two phases: first, an SPSS database (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was created with the information collected from the instrument, used to describe the studied variables; subsequently, a hypothesis test using the Chi-square was performed to determine any relationship between the variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Given the diversity of definitions of academic performance, the following are identified:

According to Caballero, Abello & Palacio (2007), academic performance involves meeting the goals, achievements, and objectives established in a student's program or course, expressed through grades resulting from assessments that determine the passing or failing of certain tests, subjects, or courses.

For Martínez & Pérez (1997), from a humanistic perspective, academic performance is the product delivered by students in educational centers, typically expressed through school grades.

Three decades ago, Pizarro (1985) referred to academic performance as a measure of indicative or responsive capacities that, in an estimative form, manifest what an individual has learned as a consequence of an instructional or training process.

On the other hand, Lamas (2015) conceptualizes academic performance as the level of knowledge demonstrated in an area or subject compared to the norm, usually measured by grade point average. According to Mora (2021), it is what enables the student to put his knowledge into practice, applying acquired information to problem-solving; in short, it is the result of schoolwork.

In the educational field, performance as a dimension for measuring results, and thus efficiency, is applied to teachers, students, schools, researchers, among others, always in terms of comparing the attainment of desired products, such as graduates incorporated into the labor market or those who have passed a specific school year (Irigoyen et al., 2011).

Academic performance is linked to the quality and efficiency of the system; in fact, educational performance is typically presented as an index to assess the overall quality of the system. School performance is complex and multidimensional.

There is a traditional conception of performance considered satisfactory when linked to "good marks" and a high level of assimilated knowledge, but also an unsatisfactory conception when students obtain negative grades, repeat courses, or achieve low levels of knowledge. In contrast to this traditional conception, it is necessary to adopt a multidimensional perspective that allows consideration of three different levels of school performance: the individual student's performance, the performance of educational centers, and the performance of the system (Morales et al., 2016). Student success or failure in the school environment is known as a conditioning factor of academic performance.

School performance translated into a number is also associated with terms such as accrediting, measuring, valuing, evaluating, among others. As can be observed, these terms do not represent the same concept. Current evaluation processes comply with certification and legitimization of knowledge and the validation of a minimum of planned curricular learning (González, 2003).

According to the Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en la Educación (2003), when assessing academic performance or individual student performance, the influence of teachers, infrastructure, and all matters related to the educational institution must also be considered.

The primary model in universities for measuring student academic performance is based on the grades obtained from their assignment and exam assessments across different courses or subjects, conducted during and at the end of them. These results reflect the degree of learning capacity they could achieve over a certain period, be it a year, a semester, or the duration of the course or subject.

Accordingly, academic performance is often defined as student success or failure, as reflected directly in his grades, with the student remaining the one judged as responsible for meeting the objectives set at the beginning of each academic period.

The conception of evaluation, as well as the procedures for carrying it out, adapt to the philosophy of the UANL 2030 Educational Model regarding new approaches to knowledge and the established roles of students and professors; these educational approaches directly impact assessment. If students construct and learn in a certain way, evaluation should provide them opportunities to apply their own learning in situations as realistic as possible, authentically reflecting their daily activities.

Thus, evaluation processes must adapt to the type of learning unit and the competencies intended to be developed in each, which should be specified in the corresponding analytical programs, requiring collaborative work and organization within academic bodies. Therefore, performance criteria are guides or principles used to judge or evaluate a student's execution, describing what is sought in the completion of evidence or products generated. From these performances, an evaluation process is established, as clear and consistent as possible, through explicitly defined evaluation criteria.

The professor, to evaluate a competency comprehensively, must use assessment methods, techniques, and instruments appropriate to what is intended to be evaluated: the transfer of conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal knowledge into professional performances.

Accordingly, among the situated learning methods considered pertinent for evaluating competencies are: project-based learning, case studies, problem-solving, situated practices, service-learning (learning service), guided research, and challenge-based learning, among others aligned with UANL's educational principles.

*Factors involved in academic performance*

Academic performance is multicausal. Various aspects relate to academic performance, involving both internal and external elements to the individual. Moreover, they can be social, cognitive, and emotional in nature, classified into three categories: personal determinants, social determinants, and institutional determinants, which, in turn, present subcategories or indicators. These variables, besides providing structural and objective information, consider the student's perception of factors associated with academic performance and their potential impact on academic results.

*Personal factors*

Personal determinants include factors of a personal nature, whose interrelations can occur based on subjective, social, and institutional variables. Below, only some personal factors related to academic performance are discussed, according to Vargas (2007), there are cognitive competence, motivation, and academic self-concept.

*Social factors*

These are factors associated with academic performance of a social nature that interact with the student's academic life, whose interrelations can occur among themselves and with personal and institutional variables.

They include: social differences, family environment, parents' educational level, mother's educational level, socioeconomic context, and demographic variables, such as: teaching methodologies, schedules of different subjects, student-to-teacher ratio, difficulty of various subjects, among others that will be addressed individually below.

*Institutional factors*

This category is defined by Carrión (2002) as non-personal components involved in the educational process, which, when interacting with personal components, influence the academic performance achieved. These include:

- ✓ teaching methodologies.
- ✓ schedules of different subjects.
- ✓ student-to-teacher ratio.
- ✓ difficulty of various subjects.

The elements acting in this category are of an institutional order, i.e., conditions, norms, admission requirements, inter-subject requirements, among other factors governing the educational institution.

Institutional factors are highly important in studies on factors associated with academic performance from a decision-making perspective, as they relate to variables that can, to some extent, be established, controlled, or modified, such as course schedules, group sizes, or program admission criteria (Montero, Villalobos & Valverde 2007).

*Thus, the following factors are identified:*

*Personal factors*

The main academic average among surveyed students, with more than a third (34.1%), is 81 to 85, while only 1.1% has an average of 96 or higher.

Surveyed students (60%) have not taken courses on a third attempt, and only a student has taken five courses on that attempt. The same applies to students who have taken courses on a fifth attempt; the majority have not done so, and only a student has taken three courses on that attempt.

Surveyed students (62.6%) feel very satisfied with the profession they are studying, and only 1.1% feels somewhat dissatisfied.

Surveyed students (63.7%) indicate they have worked during some period while studying their bachelor's degree.

Regarding students' perception of parental support, it is shown that 93.4% indicated feeling supported.

Fewer than a quarter (20.9%) of surveyed students indicated that they had applied to or entered another faculty prior to enrolling in the Faculty of Social Work and Human Development.

*Institutional factors*

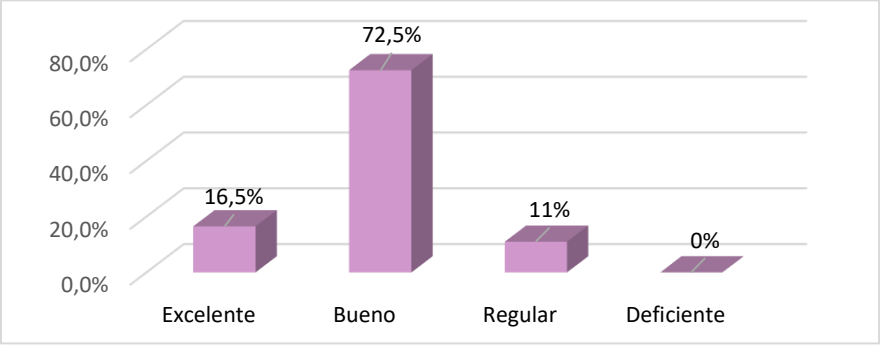


**Figure 1.** Coordination among subjects in the curriculum.

Regarding the coordination of subjects established in the curriculum, three-quarters of surveyed students indicated it as good.

The curriculum consists of 44 subjects, totaling 198 credits, distributed across nine semesters. Some professors and students commented that two subjects, due to their complexity, should be taken in higher semesters: Microsocial Analysis Theories and Macrosocial Analysis Theories.

When asked the number of subjects per semester, more than a half of the surveyed students (54.9%) indicated it seems good. In the undergraduate program analyzed, students take 6 to 7 subjects in the first semesters; from sixth semester onward, the number decreases with students taking 3 or 4 subjects. Similarly, 47.3% of surveyed students indicated the class schedule as good; however, almost a quarter (22%) mentioned it as fair. The established schedules are morning (8:00 am to 12:30 pm) and evening-night (1:45 pm to 7:35 pm).

Regarding the number of community practice hours, more than a half stated it as good (58.2%), and only 1.1% stated it as poor. For this type of practice, 10 community hours must be completed. Concerning the number of institutional practice hours, a half of surveyed students (50.5%) indicated it as good, and a third (33%) indicated it as excellent. For this type of practice, 20 weekly hours (4 hours daily) must be covered, with the option to complete them on weekends.

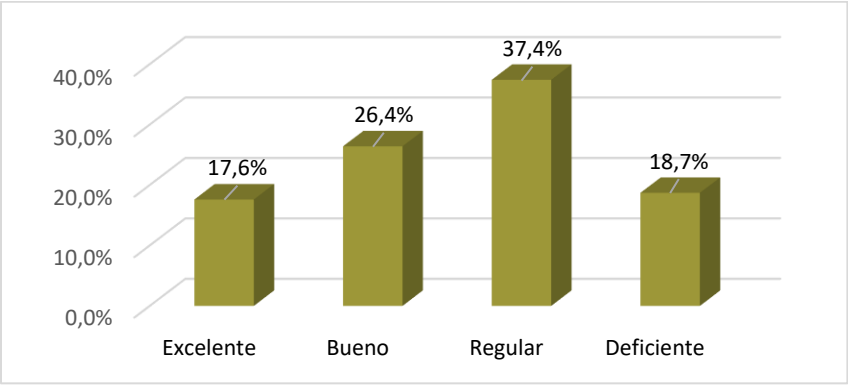


**Figure 2.** Support for study grants.

When asked the support for study grants provided by the faculty, more than a third of surveyed students (37.4%) indicated it as fair. This result is due to the increasing number of internal fee grant applications each semester, with the grants awarded being insufficient.

Regarding library services, more than a half of the students (57.1%) indicate them as good. Due to technological advancements, students increasingly use printed books less than digital documents on the internet, resulting in fewer visits to the library.

Thus, concerning the psychological support provided by the unit, more than a half of surveyed students (57.1%) indicate it as good. The Psychopedagogical Department offers psychological attention with support from students of the UANL Faculty of Psychology. After the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of students requesting this service increased.

According to surveyed students, the medical assistance provided by the faculty is good (52.7%); however, this service does not exist within the faculty itself; students are attended by NAUNL medical services personnel. It is important to note that the faculty does not have a medical care area, but NAUNL students can enroll in the IMSS (Mexican Social Security Institute).

When asked to evaluate classroom conditions, more than a half (53.8%) of surveyed students rated them as good, with little difference between the shares for excellent (23.1%) and fair (20.9%).

When asked their opinion on the computing equipment installed in classrooms, (46.2%) of surveyed students indicated it as good, and a third (33%) rated it as fair. Each classroom has a computer and a projector, as well as an interactive electronic whiteboard.

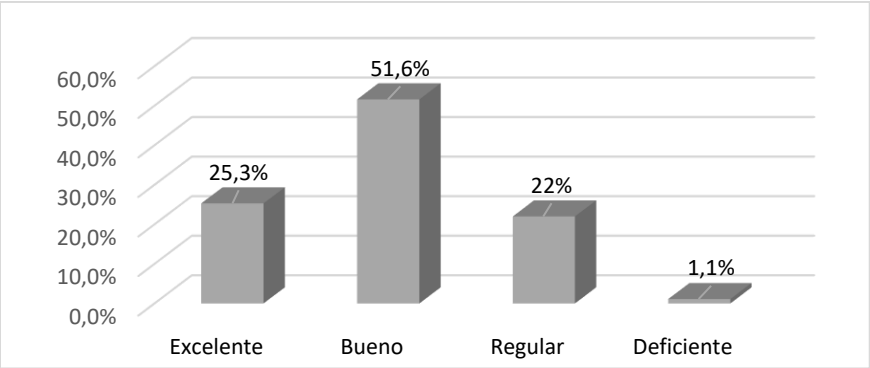


**Figure 3.** Student services.

When asked student services provided by the faculty, most of surveyed students indicated them as good, a quarter indicated them as excellent, and more than a fifth indicated them as fair. The faculty has a department for student attention (CAIE) that coordinates several programs, such as: the Talents Program, the Psychopedagogical Center, the Tutoring Program, and also provides information and support for federal or university grants.

More than a half (54.9%) of the surveyed students stated that the Administrative System used by the unit is good, and more than a quarter (29.7%) of them indicated it as fair. SIASE is an official NAUNL digital platform where students can perform some administrative procedures, such as creating class schedules, applying for grants, checking grades, evaluating professors, consulting enrollment receipts, among others.

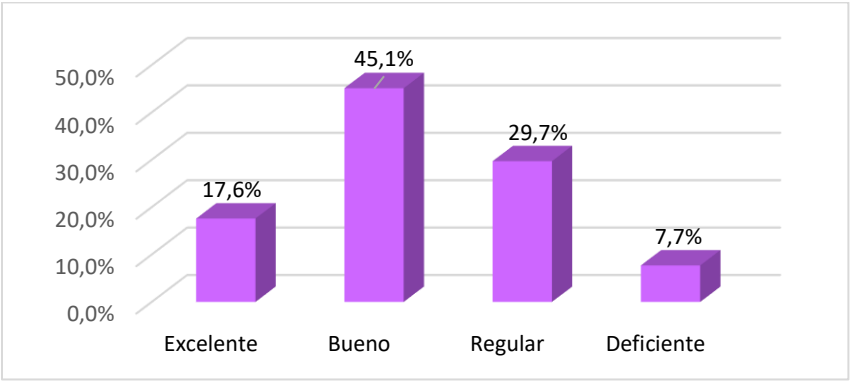


**Figure 4.** Resolution of school situations.

With respect to the resolution of school matters by the corresponding administrative offices —namely the Department of School Records and Archives and the Academic Secretariat— almost half of the students reported it as good, while more than a quarter reported it as fair. The most common cases among students involve problems with their schedules, enrollment receipts, subjects or semesters and college dropout.

Regarding the use of technological tools by the professor, more than a half of the students (54.9%) indicated them as always used, maybe because they took classes online in the last semester.

Concerning whether the professor is a good presenter, almost half of the students indicated it as almost always (49.5%), whereas a fifth reported it as sometimes (20.9%). When asked if the professor has updated knowledge of his subject, most of the students indicated it as always (35.2%) and almost always (41.8%). Regarding whether the professor relates course content to real situations, most of students indicated it as always (45.1%).

When asked whether the professor merely repeats texts without offering any personal contributions, nearly four out of ten students indicated it as almost always (37.4%) reported it as almost always, and almost three out of ten (27.5%) stated it as sometimes. Similarly, 49.5% of students indicated that the evaluations conducted by professors are almost always coherent with the material covered in class, while none responded it as very rarely. Additionally, (46.2%) of surveyed students reported that the professor listens to them and provides feedback in an environment of respect and dialogue, with only 3.3% indicating that this happens very rarely.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the variables corresponding to institutional factors, creating a new variable (Institution) that groups the 14 variables, calculating the mean and standard deviation.

With these data, the following calculations were made to obtain intervals and determine the weak, moderate, and solid categories, creating a new variable named «Institution Classification».

31.275 - (0.75) (5.871) = 31.275 - 4.40325 = 26.87, equivalent to 27
31.275+ (0.75) (5.871) = 31.275 + 4.40325 = 35.68, equivalent to 36

Subsequently, the Chi-square was calculated with a significance level of 0.05 to determine the relationship between the academic performance variable and the variables corresponding to institutional factors, already grouped into the new variable:

**Chi-Square Tests**

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 35.236(a) | 36 | .505 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 39.087 | 36 | .333 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.330 | 1 | .249 |
| N of Valid Cases | 91 | | |

55 cells (96.5 %) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20

Therefore, it was determined that there is no relationship between the school performance variable and institutional factors, as the significance of the Chi-Square .505 is greater than 0.05.

The results showed that students are satisfied with the choice of their major, as well as with the institutional services offered by the faculty and with professor performance.

However, it is advisable to apply strategies that cause student satisfaction in variables showing low satisfaction, such as: class schedule, where 22% of surveyed students indicated it as fair; support for study grants, where more than a third (37.4%) students indicated it as fair and two out of ten students indicated

it as poor; regarding classroom computing equipment, a third (33%) stated it as fair; the SIASE administrative system, where almost a quarter (24.2%) stated it as fair; and finally, concerning the resolution of school situations, almost a third (29.7%) stated it as fair and 7.7% stated it as poor.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study does not find an influence of institutional factors on academic performance. This disagreement with what has been empirically supported by other authors is due to various factors, such as not working with raw grade scores, the institution's grading system, and whether these scores truly reflect the student's performance during his training, among others. The discussion about the higher education quality is debated due to its conceptual nature; there is no agreement criterion, and multiple important factors are involved, with student academic performance being only a dimension of its analysis.

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