

EDITORIAL

SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Education is an essential precondition for personal development, the achievement of life and work goals, and a successful and satisfied life in general. Therefore, promoting success and eliminating failure in education is vital. Success and failure in education are two concepts that have been the subject of extensive research and discussion for many years. In the current special issue, *Success and Failure in Upper Secondary Education*, we address fundamental questions concerning the causes, consequences, and solutions for student success and failure in upper secondary education. Because there are different ways for scholars to understand success and failure in education, we have taken a broad approach to exploring this topic.

The first crucial consideration is the success and failure associated with entering upper secondary education, as the career decision at the end of lower secondary education is associated with many external and internal obstacles and risks (Kulcsár et al., 2020) and can have various short- and long-term consequences for an individual. We previously addressed this matter in the special issue *Transitions in Educational Contexts* (Neuenschwander & Hlad'o, 2019). Failure in career decisions can manifest in emotional and social problems, such as social isolation or difficulties establishing new relationships with peers (Haynie & South, 2005). Failure to enter upper secondary education can also negatively affect motivation to study, educational aspirations, academic achievement, and school attendance (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004). In addition, it can lead to alienation from school, resulting in dropout and unemployment (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

If we focus directly on success and failure in upper secondary education, conceptually different views can be identified in the literature. The basis for student success or failure may lie in individual characteristics, family background, social context, and school conditions (Quin, 2017). As Chacón Fuertes and Huertas Hurtado (2017) noted, some individual-level variables play a role, such as self-concept, general and emotional intelligence, achievement motivation, use of learning techniques, and the type of attributions individuals

make for the outcomes they achieve. Family background, which can affect educational success and failure, includes the socioeconomic status of parents, family structure, interrelationships among family members, parenting style, parental expectations, and the quality of instrumental and emotional support (Benner et al., 2016). Regarding the social context, academic success and failure are explained by variables such as social inequalities or demographic and cultural characteristics (Needham et al., 2004). School conditions, classroom conditions, and teacher quality are other factors influencing student success and failure in upper secondary education. Causes may include school climate, structures, student body composition, class size, and resources (Hoy, 2012). Student success and failure may even be attributed to teacher professional development (Timperley et al., 2007), teacher pedagogical knowledge (Hill et al., 2005), teacher-student relationships (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), and teacher personality, attitudes, competencies, and perceptions (Sahin & Gülmez, 2000). Highly qualified, experienced, and motivated teachers can provide students with the guidance and support they need to succeed academically. Clearly, school success and failure are incredibly complex educational phenomena that are influenced by multiple factors at different levels.

Another concern is the short- and long-term effects of success and failure in education. Those who fail in school run the risk of dropping out, not fitting into the labor market, having a destabilized individual life course, and even becoming ill (Needham et al., 2004). Equally important are the study circumstances, functions, conditions, progression, and completion, including assessments and final examinations. Assessments and final examinations are essential components of the learning process (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Piopiunik et al., 2014). They provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, receive feedback on their performance, and identify areas in which they need to improve. In addition, assessments and final examinations serve as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning and can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of educational programs.

We are pleased that many of these topics are covered in this special issue, offering a wealth of new insights to the discussion of success and failure in upper secondary education.

Dominik Dvořák, Jaroslava Simonová, Jan Vyhnálek, and Petr Gal in their study *Days After a Choice Is Made: Transition to Professional and Vocational Upper Secondary Schools in Czechia*, examine how students experience the transition from lower to upper secondary school and how daily routines, perceptions of curriculum and instruction, and interpersonal relationships change after the transition. The authors provide fruitful qualitative insights into the

transition and adjustment to upper secondary education in the vocational stream. The knowledge presented in this study can, for example, help teachers to support student success during their educational transition.

The study by Victoria Rolfe and Monica Rosén—*Delays and Dropouts: Identifying Risks of Suboptimal Post-Compulsory Educational Pathways in Sweden*—addresses the question of which suboptimal educational pathways students take after completing compulsory education and which sociodemographic characteristics predict the post-compulsory educational pathways of Swedish youth. The results of this quantitative study add to the knowledge about delayed school completion and dropout from upper secondary education by revealing the sociodemographic risks of a suboptimal educational path.

Doris Bühler-Niederberger and Claudia Schuchart contributed to this special issue with a study entitled *Academic Second-Chance Education: Correction or Consolidation of Early Selection?* The authors focused on adults who had completed a first school career in various types of schools in the highly stratified German school system and who returned to upper secondary education to obtain their eligibility to study via second-chance education. Bühler-Niederberger and Schuchart developed a theoretical framework based on the analysis of interviews to investigate how normative orientations learned in different types of school might influence adult student learning behavior and, thus, their chances of success in second-chance education. The findings suggest that prior schooling influences success and that second-chance schools should adapt their support systems to the school-type-specific prerequisites of their students.

Failure to graduate presents a barrier to further study or employment. Not completing upper secondary education often entails an increased risk of social exclusion for students and indicates a risk of not fitting into the labor market. The study by Albert Dueggeli, *Youth at Risk in Higher Levels of Upper Secondary Education: A Supportive Intervention to Prevent School Failure and Drop Out*, addresses how students whose parents have an immigrant background can be supported in upper secondary education to prevent dropout. The author presents the results of a support-oriented intervention, regarding the effects of the intervention on grades, student self-concept, and the motivational aspects of learning. Lenka Hloušková, Klára Záleská, and Tereza Vengřinová contributed to this topic with their study *Educational Decision Making of Repeatedly Unsuccessful Czech Vocational Education and Training Examinees Leading to Passing the Matura Exam*. The authors focused on the decision-making processes of repeatedly unsuccessful VET examinees. Using biographical narrative interviews with examinees who failed the Matura exam at least twice, they determined how examinees make their decisions regarding the exam and how their decision-making paths differ.

The issue concludes with the emerging researcher section, which includes the review study *Typologies of Early School Leavers from Secondary Education* by Petr Gal. The goal of the study was to provide a comprehensive summary of the empirical evidence on the typologies of school dropout. Petr Gal summarizes common patterns and risk factors associated with dropping out of upper secondary education by examining the different typologies of dropouts. The study can help educators and policymakers develop targeted interventions and support programs to prevent dropout and to support at-risk students.

This special issue of *Studia paedagogica* contains several interesting studies. We hope that the issue will offer new insights and raise new questions that will enrich research and practice. We wish our readers a rewarding read.

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Editors

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