

The Mediating Role of Academic Burnout between Goal Orientation and Drop-out among Italian University Students



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Goal orientation in learning and academic burnout are key factors influencing students' success and engagement in the academic system. Among the various theories of goal orientation, the trichotomous model theorized by Elliot (1997), in which students engage in a task for multiple reasons and each reason has a different impact on academic outcomes, is currently the most widely used. Understanding these factors can provide important insights to enhance students' educational experience and reduce the risk of drop-out. A cross-sectional study involving 1497 Italian university students investigated the mediating role of academic burnout (professional efficacy, cynicism, and emotional exhaustion) in the association between achievement goals (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance) and academic drop-out. Structural equation modeling was employed to evaluate the association between variables. Mediation analysis revealed that cynicism and professional efficacy fully mediate the association between mastery and drop-out (cynicism: $\beta = -.28$, $p \leq .001$; professional efficacy: $\beta = -.17$, $p \leq .001$), while they partially mediate the association between performance-avoidance goals and drop-out (cynicism: $\beta = .21$, $p \leq .001$; professional efficacy: $\beta = .05$, $p \leq .001$), and between performance-approach goals and drop-out via professional efficacy ($\beta = -.04$, $p \leq .001$). These results show complex links among goal orientations, burnout, and drop-out in university students. Mastery orientation correlates with resilience to drop-out via cynicism and professional efficacy. Performance-avoidance goals partly mediate drop-out risk. Professional efficacy promotes persistence towards challenges for performance-approach goals. These data could be useful application implications, from a preventive of view, in programs promoting mastery orientation, to avoid drop-out and promote student well-being.

References:

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Biography:

Dr. Arianna Nicita is a psychologist, born in Messina. She has a master's degree in clinical and health psychology from the University of Messina. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD in Psychology at the "Magna Graecia" University of Catanzaro. Recently, she has published research on PTSD in children, cognitive flexibility in autism spectrum disorders, and ADHD. Dr. Nicita is actively engaged in studying risk and protective factors influencing university success. Her commitment to advancing psychological knowledge is reflected in her recent publications, showcasing her passion for understanding and addressing mental health challenges.