

STAY OR LEAVE? EMOTIONAL AND MOTIVATIONAL PROFILES OF ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONSIDERING ACADEMIC DROPOUT: A CLUSTER ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

In the context of rising university dropout rates in Romania, this study investigates how emotional and motivational characteristics differentiate student profiles associated with different levels of dropout intention. The main objective was to identify distinct psychological profiles based on neuroticism, fear of failure, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation, as well as to analyse the relationship between these and dropout intention. The sample consisted of 107 Romanian students who completed the following standardised instruments: Academic Motivation Scale – AMS-C28, College Version for measuring motivation, International Personality Item Pool – IPIP-Ro for measuring neuroticism (IPIP-Ro), Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory- Short Form (PFAI) for fear of failure, and Academic Maladjustment Questionnaire for dropout intention. Through K-means cluster analysis, three student profiles were identified: (1) amotivated, characterised by low levels of motivation and high levels of amotivation; (2) self-motivated, defined by high levels of motivation and low levels of neuroticism and fear of failure; and (3) anxious-controlled, characterised by high neuroticism, high fear of failure, and moderate levels of motivation. The results of the Welch ANOVA analysis indicated significant differences between the three profiles in terms of academic dropout intention. Post-hoc Games-Howell tests showed that students in the "autonomously motivated" profile report significantly lower dropout intentions than those in the "amotivated" and "anxious-controlled" profiles. The results highlight the protective role of academic motivation and emotional stability in preventing university dropout and emphasise the need to implement educational interventions aimed at strengthening motivation and emotional regulation.

Keywords: dropout intention, motivation, neuroticism, fear of failure, cluster analysis

INTRODUCTION

Academic success and prevention of university dropout are important topics in educational research, with implications at both the individual and societal levels. Academic dropout is associated with difficulties in professional integration, psychological vulnerability, and high social costs. In this context, the literature emphasises the importance of psychological factors in maintaining academic engagement and reducing the risk of dropout.

From a classical perspective, Tinto describes university dropout as the result of a progressive process of disengagement from the academic environment, determined by low levels of academic and social integration [1]. Students who fail to develop