Research Article

Underlying reasons behind the achievement of successful university students: A phenomenological inquiry

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Success is a concept on which various studies are carried out and is critical in attaining goals and shaping our future. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors behind the achievement of academically successful university students. A qualitative phenomenological research design was adopted in this qualitative study. The phenomenological pattern can be used to focus on phenomena about which we don't have a complete grasp. The study focused on the phenomenon of success and the perception of this phenomenon was investigated in depth. Extreme and deviant case sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was employed. Among the senior students enrolled in a higher education institution in the Western Black Sea Region, the students who are in the top five of their departments according to their GPA constitute the participants of this study. Interviews were conducted and recorded with a total of 17 successful students from three faculties and two colleges voluntarily. The data of the study were collected through an information form in which the students declared their personal information and a semi-structured interview form prepared to reveal the reasons behind their success. As a result, the reasons behind the success of the students point to five themes. These were determined as responsibility, motivation, support, academic skills and social skills.

Keywords: Academic achievement, successful university students, reasons for success

1. Introduction

Achievement has been a major topic for discussion and inquiry because it is connected to the success of individuals' goals and the quality of their future lives. This concept is mostly used to refer to real-life achievements and to evaluate a person's life (Bhatia, 2009). Achievement is defined as an individual's performance competence in knowledge or skills. Aforementioned performance is obtained as a result of determining the performance of the curriculum applied at school or college through a series of educational tests (Aggarwal & Thakur, 2013). This is sometimes referred to as academic achievement. Academic achievement is defined as a score, degree, or certificate that reflects knowledge, competency, and higher-level achievement (Collins & O'Brien, 2011).

According to various studies in the literature, a variety of factors influence student achievement. Different research reports have provided results on the influence of different factors. For example, a study conducted by Olufemi et al. (2018) revealed the effect of student, parent, school and teacher variables on achievement, while Sarier (2016) found that socio-economic position, self-efficacy and motivation were the most effective factors in a meta-analysis study. In a similar vein, Eratlı Şirin and Şahin (2020) emphasized the significance of the father's educational background, instructor support, and communication, as well as gender, the manner of choosing a university/department (voluntary or forced), and vocational counseling competency. While Mushtaq and Khan (2012) stressed the significance of communication in student performance, they also stated that while learning opportunities and adequate supervision were beneficial, family pressure was detrimental. Gender, academic year level, class participation, teaching methods and approaches, weekly schedules, socio-demographic features of students, student health concerns, and study hours, on the other hand, are all factors that influence student achievement, according to İbrahim (2013).

In another study by Topçu and Uzundumlu (2012), motivational problems, lack of study skills, incorrect choice, future anxiety, poor physical facilities of the school, and deficiencies in practices were all shown to be factors in student failure. It is understood that these findings are in line with those that influence success. These findings appear to be comparable to those that have been discovered in the case of achievement.

Intrinsic and extrinsic variables have been identified in several studies as factors that influence success. They discussed variables related to the individual, such as personal, educational background, practical learning ability, personal experience, individual characteristics and personal interests, determination, self-efficacy, sense of responsibility, and goal setting, within the scope of intrinsic factors. They proposed aspects such as family, student-instructor relationship, learning environment, and institution quality as extrinsic variables (Chen, 1998; Ensign & Woods, 2014).

Self-regulation skills, which are part of the range of internal variables that influence an individual's performance, are considered as particularly essential. People with self-regulation abilities can become specialists in their own learning. Three aspects of self-regulated learning include self-regulated learning techniques, self-feedback on learning effectiveness, and interdependent motivational mechanisms (Zimmerman, 1990). A crucial part of learning for college students is self-regulated learning. Students can learn how to learn independently, and teachers can promote independent learning in their classrooms (Abar & Loken, 2010; Pintrich, 1995). These skills are connected to the work habits, strategies, planning, and motivation. In medical school students, Turan and Demirel (2010) identified a connection between self-regulated learning and achievement. At all levels of self-regulated learning, successful students have been found to utilize these strategies more frequently. Similarly, in the study of Kuyumcu Vardar (2011), it was observed that student achievement was significantly higher in English teaching, depending on the use of self-regulation strategies.

Higher education aims to train high-level manpower that society needs, to solve the problems of society and to conduct scientific research to improve society, and to contribute to the development of science and technique. It also plays an important role in the development of the individual. It is a vital step in achieving long-term objectives, establishing a profession, and gaining social prestige for an individual. As a result, the individual's current achievement will be the source of his future career. Higher education acts as a conduit for societal economic, social, and cultural growth, thus the achievements accomplished during this period will benefit not just the person but also society.

The purpose of this study is to figure out the reason of the achievement of university students. In other words, the factors that are effective behind the achievement of academically successful university students were investigated. To achieve this goal, the author focused on the contribution of individual's self, family, school, teacher, and environment elements to the success.

2. Methods

This research is based on a qualitative phenomenology methodology which can be used to concentrate on circumstances that we don't fully comprehend. Phenomena can take the form of occurrences, experiences, orientations, perceptions, conceptions, and situations in the world we live in (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The success phenomenon was examined in this study in a detailed way.

2.1. Participants

Extreme and deviant case sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used to investigate the success phenomenon in the study. A purposeful sampling strategy can be used to find and explain many facts and events. On the other hand, extreme or deviant sampling can expose more data than normal settings and aid in a multidimensional comprehension of the study subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The sample group comprises students in their final year of a faculty or college at a university in the Western Black Sea region who are in the top five according to their GPA. Students were

selected from a total of five faculty or college. 25 top-performing students from these institutions were enrolled in the study group, and a total of 17 volunteer students were interviewed.

2.2. Instruments

Data was collected through an information form to determine students' personal information and a semi-structured interview form to examine the reasons behind their success. A thorough literature review was conducted throughout the development process of the form. In the information form section, students are asked 18 questions including their gender, date of birth, GPA, number of siblings, parents' occupations, educational status and age, and economic status, among other things. The interview questions part incorporates semi-structured interview questions on personal traits regarded to be useful in being successful, studying, attending classes, and listening habits, working environment, and social acculturation. The information form and the interview form were presented to two experts with experience in qualitative research methodologies and curriculum development, who evaluated their adequacy in terms of method and scope.

2.3. Data Collection

Interviews with students who rank in the top five in each faculty or college based on their weighted grade point average were scheduled after the necessary permission procedures for the research were completed. Interviews with students who volunteered were conducted. The interviews took conducted at the faculty/school, which is a peaceful and safe atmosphere for the pupils. In general, the conversations went forward without a time restriction. The interview was paused for a brief time, the audio recording was switched off, and it was then restarted from where it left off when there was a need to take a break for various reasons, even if it was infrequent. The first four interviews were conducted with an observer, and the observer's opinions and recommendations were taken into consideration. The researcher and the participant then conducted follow-up interviews.

The students were requested to complete the information form before beginning the interview. To establish the reasons for success, semi-structured interview questions were asked in the second stage. All of the interviews in the second stage were audio recorded with the participants' permission.

A total of 17 people were interviewed and the interviews were voice recorded. The recorded interview with each student lasted a minimum of 32 minutes and a maximum of 50 minutes. In addition, pre-interviews were held for approximately 15-20 minutes, which were not recorded, and the participants were given the opportunity to answer the questions on the information form during this process.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the research were subjected to content analysis. The data is characterized through content analysis, and the facts buried in the data are attempted to be extracted (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The following steps were followed for the analysis procedure:
- After listening to the audio recording of the interview, the researcher's questions and the participant's responses were transformed into textual form without any edits or adjustments. The converted texts contain a total of 58568 words.
- Each participant's interview was assigned a code number. For example, the Faculty of Forestry has a "F" code, whereas the Faculty of Medicine has a "M" code.
- All of the texts were initially read in their entirety. The text's conceptual meaning for each word, sentence, and paragraph was then determined, and the coding was completed.
- In the code list, codes that were connected in terms of meaning were compiled and revised.
- The themes were determined by looking for commonalities amongst the codes. The upper themes were reached after an examination of the topics.
- The emerging themes and sub-themes were examined and rearranged in light of the codes and their relevance to the purpose of the study.

- Data were interpreted considering the generated codes and themes as well as supported with direct quotations.

2.5. Validity and Reliability

Face-to-face interviews with participants were carried out in their faculty or college context. A preliminary talk with the participants was held before to the interview, and personal-demographic information was acquired, followed by interview questions pertaining to the research aim. It was attempted to provide as much long-term interaction with participants as possible. Long-term involvement is critical for validity, because the more time a researcher spends in the area, the more accurate his explanation will be (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2017).

The information was meticulously documented and transcribed without any alterations. Furthermore, direct quotations were used to support the research results. Validity is determined by reporting the obtained data in detail and describing how the results were obtained at (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2017; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). One of the ways for ensuring credibility is to use direct citations. It can allow the reader to assess the researcher's conclusions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The research results were interpreted in light of other research findings. Studies in the existing literature on the same topic can be utilized to confirm reliability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

3. Findings

The following themes about the reasons behind the achievement of successful students were investigated on the basis of the content analysis carried out in accordance with the purpose of the study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Reasons for academic success
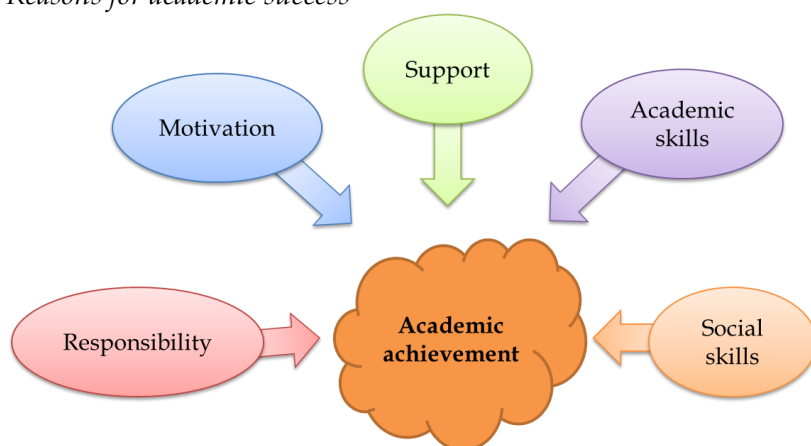
The factors that influence student achievement are structured around five themes. These are expressed as responsibility, motivation, support, academic skills, and social skills. The findings of the study are presented under these headings.

3.1. Responsibility

Findings obtained from interviews with students showed that sense of responsibility plays a vital role in success. These responsibilities may be towards the parent, the course, or the immediate surrounding (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Aspects of sense of responsibility
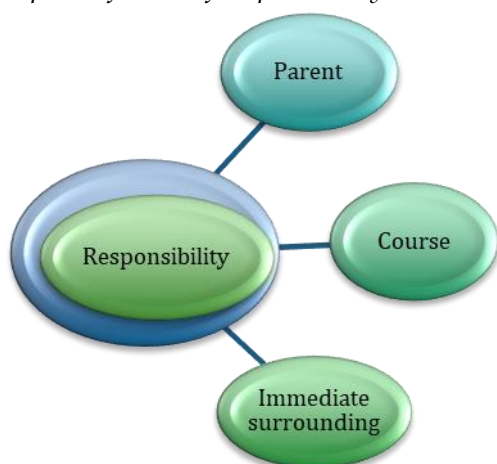
It was found that the students who took part in the study feel a strong sense of responsibility toward their parents in order to succeed. It has been determined that feelings/anxieties such as worrying about being a burden to parents, making them proud/happy, meeting expectations, conscientious responsibility/feeling owed cause responsibilities towards parents.

For instance, it is apparent that F5 feels a conscious responsibility towards what his family does for him by stating:

> My family often asks about our lessons and does whatever we want. The environment in my family is perfect. For instance, there is no noise and I am in a non-conflict environment. My parents are also quite polite to me; I mean I'm the oldest child in the family. They attempt to give us whatever we want. They are trying to do whatever else we want.

Another student, F5, expresses his pride in her family as, "Now I say that I will be the 1st in the faculty. I hope I will. They were so proud when I told them. Frankly, I want to see my father and mother happy".

Students expressed their responsibilities towards the lesson course as attending regularly, doing homework and listening to the lesson. All of the students stated that they attend the course regularly and avoid absenteeism unless there is a compelling reason. The common view of the students is that the lesson was learned in the lesson, and they stated that they were good listeners in the class and did their homework completely. Among the participants, the view of the H9 coded student is as follows:

> For example, I never do school absenteeism. When I'm absenteeism, I feel like I'm falling behind, so I'm not comfortable at all. That is the reason why, my attendance is high; I feel like if I do not attend school, I will not be able to recover.

The views of TH2, one of the participants, are as follows in terms of responsibilities towards the course and homework:

> I always do it when we need to prepare a presentation or when we have to deliver homework. But when the lesson is over and I go home, I neither study nor repeat the subject, but I do not neglect to listen to my lessons.

These students not only feel responsible for the lessons but also feel a sense of responsibility towards the people around them. These responsibilities can be seen as an indication of fulfilling the duties they undertake and the promises they make. Another student, M13 stated that, "When it's my turn, I don't feel comfortable if I don't do that task right away. I think it's a good thing, but I mean, when I'm given a task, I try to do it the best I can…"

3.2. Motivation/desire for success

It was found that the students who took part in the study had success from the start of the academic year or in subsequent years. As motivating conditions for these students' achievement, the sub-categories of personal desires, parent, professional reputation were identified (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Sources for student motivation
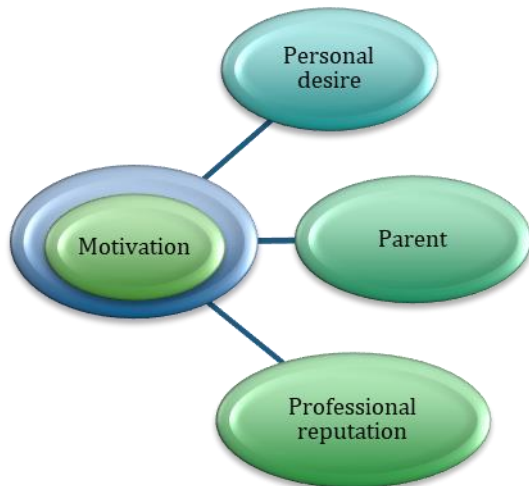
Individuals' aspirations for success to prove themselves and satisfy their egos, as well as their appreciation of success and enjoyment of working, were found in the personal desires sub-category. Students' sense of obligation toward their families is also found to be a great motivator for them to succeed. Students want to achieve for a variety of reasons, including pleasing their parents, meeting their expectations, and making them proud, among others. Professional reputation is another important factor that motivates success. Successful people want to stand on their own feet, gain status and advance in their careers.

Among the participants, F5 stated the reason of his motivation as:

> To begin with, one of the reasons I consider being successful to have a better career. I also enjoy being successful, and I don't want to be left behind. I recognize that my parents worked tirelessly to educate us and that I should honor their efforts. This is possibly the most crucial. When I see them working for me instead of having a career, it motivates me to work more.

Another student, F6, stated that she wants to be a successful student because she could make her family proud and happy in that way, by stating:

> When I got good grades, I realized my mom was pleased. My kid was like this in college or something, she responds. When I get compliments from my lecturers, I tell her, and she is overjoyed. If I be promoted to the position of first in the department, I believe she will be happier.

3.3. Getting support

As another finding, it is observed that successful students are either influenced or supported by their parents, school, or immediate surrounding (see Figure 4).

The support given by the families can sometimes be shown intensely by the mother or the father. This support, in addition to financial one, can be considered as trusting, motivating, instilling the habit of working, and cooperating. In this sense, the following statement belongs to H8.

> They did not, for example, interfere with my choice of department; instead, they supported me when I stated, "I want to do this, I want to take this exam." That's how they back me up; they believe in me, and I believe in them.

Figure 4
Supporting factors that help students succeed
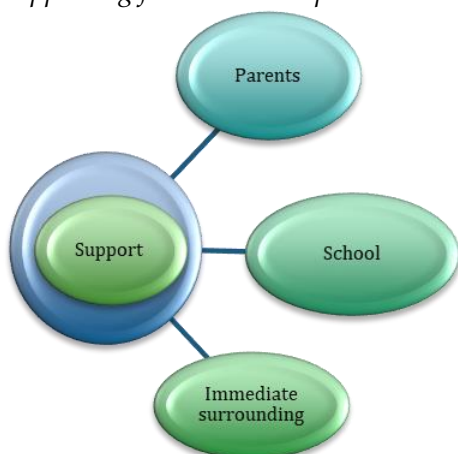
It has also been determined that successful students commonly use the libraries of their institutions. The students have noted that they use this facility to complete their homework, making research, and study.

It is understood that successful students receive support from immediate surroundings such as teachers, friends and close relatives. it has been determined that students whose lecturers teach in an effective and entertaining way, have good expressive power, are willing to answer questions, and are open to communication during class/out-of-school times are more successful in their lessons.

In this regard, one of the students described her lecturer's encouragement over their previous student years as:

> I still meet with my primary and secondary school teachers whenever I get the opportunity. They are all trying to support me as much as they can. I got a lot of support from all of them. They helped me a lot, including the university exam. I guess I wouldn't be me without them.

3.4. Academic Skills

Successful students have the skills to recognize their academic skills and weaknesses, develop study plans, listen effectively, cope with academic challenges, and plan an academic future, according to one of the findings from the interviews (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Academic skills of successful students

It was determined that successful students aware of their academicals proficiencies as well as knowing themselves and their interests. According to the findings, students in verbal-oriented departments do better in verbal courses, while students in numerical-oriented departments perform better in numerical courses. In this sense, TH3 and F5 stated respectively:

> In verbal classes, I believe I do better compare to the numerical classes. I'm having trouble with it because I don't particularly enjoy numerical lessons. Lessons in verbal classes and foreign languages fascinate me more, and I am more effective in these courses.

> For me, mathematics and physics are essential lessons. I enjoy geometry, especially biology, and I was well-taught by a teacher. The subjects I was weak in were literature lessons; I failed in the first year of Turkish literate class.

The findings show that each student has a unique study strategy. Although the duration and frequency of the study varies according to the student, the students stated that they work between one and four hours a day. However, it cannot be said that the time students spend on studying is regular. Some days, while students work less, some days they work harder to understand a subject they do not understand, prepare homework and prepare for exams. The students stated that they did not make a written plan for studying, but they stated that they planned mentally which day they would study. However, they noted that they made these plans to complete short-term assignments or to prepare for the exam.

The students stated that they made various preparations before starting their education. These are providing and organizing lecture notes, asking teachers/peers about things they don't know, organizing the topics to be studied, resting before study and choosing and arranging the study environment. It is seen that students benefit from methods such as writing/note-taking, underlining important points, summarizing, reading repeatedly, reading aloud/silent, and self-explanatory. For instance, one of the students, M15 stated, "I highlight, sometimes take notes, and sometimes I repeat myself... I don't study my notes; instead, I retake them, so… I take small notes while working."

Another finding was that the students grouped the topics while studying, and proceeded from the broad to the specific by paying attention to and reviewing the critical parts. The majority of the students stated that they studied the subject until they fully understood it instead of memorizing it, and stated that they tried to learn the subject in depth. The students stated that they worked alone at first, and then collaborated with their peers to repeat the subject, ask questions to each other and share information.

In the exam preparation period, some students stated that they were preparing for the exam in the last days or the last few weeks, while others indicated that they studied regularly throughout the semester and did not leave a topic for the last week. T11, who stated that he works regularly, said: "I don't have a problem as I do it again every day. I finish repeating my lessons long before the exam. I had no problem leaving it to the last day".

In terms of working environment, students stated that they can work in different environments. Students who can work at a desk, bed or any other place as a study environment do not have any habit of quiet/noisy, regular/unorganized environment. While the order and silence of the environment were effective for some students, some other stated that these factors do not affect them.

One of the students, H9 indicated regarding the study environment that,

> The sound factor does not affect me much, even if it is an environment with sound, it does not bother me much because I work with sound myself. The environment can be quiet or noisy. It doesn't distract me as it's not a problem for me. To be honest, I'm not someone who likes to work at a desk. I take what I want to do and I like to work from where I sit. Sometimes I work lying down, taking the document and reading it. Desk looks gloomy to me, it makes me nervous, how to say, I try to be comfortable while studying for exams.

The findings showed that the students were active listeners in the lesson and gave importance to listening to the lesson. In addition, students take notes, highlight important points in class when necessary, and ask questions where they do not understand. While students are good listeners,

being active participants varies from person to person. Some students participate actively in the lesson, while others rarely participate in the lesson.

In this regard, H8 stated that, "I do not speak too much in the class and mostly I do not participate, I prefer to listen…". The opinion of F6 on this subject is as follows:

> I write a short sentence to remind the subject if the lecturer is teaching. For example, I don't write down everything the teacher says. Instead, I write down the things that I think are important as a sentence, leave it, and then listen to the teacher.

Although students are successful, they have difficulties, fail and even get low grades in some courses. In such a situation, there were some who said that they were worried, uneasy and felt very bad, and there were also those who said that they saw it as normal and looked for fault in themselves. However, it has been determined that although students experience emotional problems when they encounter difficult lessons, they develop strategies to cope with them. Working hard, dedicating extra time, repeating the topic, identifying deficiencies, prioritizing study in that lesson, getting help from a knowledgeable peer or teacher, reviewing additional resources, listening more carefully, paying attention to class participation, and other strategies have been used to cope with challenging courses.

A student, M13 stated how he received support in a subject he had difficulty with:

> I do a few additional readings, asking someone familiar with the subject. I ask someone who knows better than me, sometimes a teacher, sometimes my friends. Even if I still don't understand, if I have resources I can look, that's all.

Finally, it was determined that the majority of the students stated that they wanted to pursue an academic career as well as graduate/specialty education. Some students also shared their desire to work in the public or private sector. In addition, the students stated that they made various preparations for their future plans and continued their courses.

In the sense of future target, TH1 stated that:

> I have both immediate and long-term objectives. In the long run, I'd like to pursue a career in academia, but if that isn't possible, I'd like to work in hotel management or as a private sector agency. I see myself largely in agencies, although I haven't fully differentiated myself yet. Business life, I believe, will be advantageous to my decision.

3.5. Social Skills

Some social characteristics of successful students have been identified. These features were determined as adapting to new circumstances, selectiveness, and developing positive relationships (see Figure 6).

Figure 6
Social skills of successful students
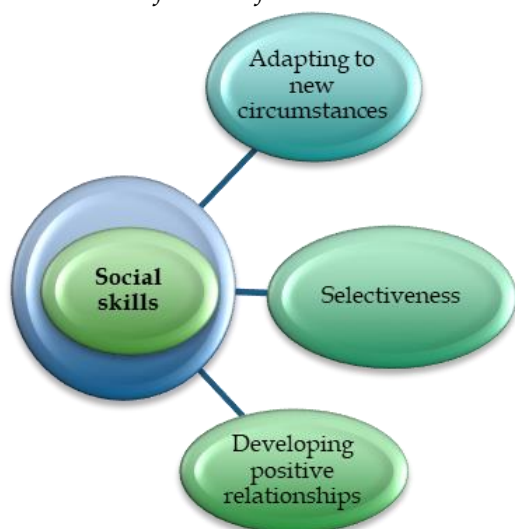
It has been found that when students first begin their university careers, they experience negative feelings such as disliking their department or university and being disappointed. However, it was revealed that they overcome their feelings, adapted to university life, and claimed that their pleasure level increased. They were able to cope with their negative thoughts and did not express any concern that it was affecting their success. When he first arrived at university, M15 explained his feelings and adaptation process when he first came to the university as, "Hmm, I guess I'm used to it, so as I mentioned before, I didn't come here willingly. It's also a long way. I'm not sure, but I'm used to it." In a similar manner, TH2 pointed out:

> When we first came to university, I felt so lonely, I felt like in the desert, then I went to class. The teacher is teaching something, I thought what would I do if I had not listened to the lesson. I thought about what to focus myself on here. Frankly, I made an effort to attend the lecture. Some of the teachers in the first year did not enter the second year, the teachers in the first year were able to attract me to the lesson. Maybe that's why I concentrated better.

As another finding, it is seen that successful students are more selective in choosing friends and can use technology in line with their needs. Only a few of the successful students who generally avoid taking on tasks that are not meaningful to them expressed their willingness to undertake the task. The view of TH1 on undertaking a task is as follows:

> I mean, it may be perceived as laziness, but it bothers me. For example, if something has to be done, the teacher selects one person and instructs them on what needs to be done. I'm not sure why I don't like it. I don't want to raise my hand because there are so many individuals that want to do the job, but I'm not sure why.

It has been determined that successful students are also selective in choosing friends, they meet with a limited number of people, and they do not prefer to meet with many people. In addition, students stated that they use technology only as much as they need and mostly for homework and study. Some students stated that they use technology to access the internet and social media sites.

Students who are successful appear to have positive relationships with their families, teachers, and peers. None of the students mentioned experiencing problems with the people in their environment. It is assumed that they have good mutual communication in their family relationships; those who live apart from their families frequently talk on the phone, share their lessons and information on numerous issues, and have a strong sense of loyalty and trust. However, some of the students (about half) appear to have a closer relationship with their mother, sharing everything and acting as friends.

One of the students, F5, described her relationship with her friends as:

> I mostly get along well with my friends. For example, at university, I strive not to offend anyone. I also see a lot of my high school pals. We are still in contact with them and have scheduled meetings with them…"

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that successful students have a sense of responsibility towards their parents, the class, and those around them. It has been observed that this responsibility is more severe towards the parent. Various research results also emphasize students' sense of responsibility. For example, Sparkman et al (2012) examined the non-cognitive predictors of university success and determined that the success of social responsibility was the strongest predictor of emotional intelligence on students' competence. In the study of Dursun and Dede (2004) on the factors affecting students' mathematics achievement, the most effective factor in students' mathematics achievement was found to be the listening to the lesson.

Motivation is a key factor in students' performance since it can drive an individual's behavior and allow him to focus on the work at hand. The motivational state, which pushes a person toward a certain goal, goal attainment behavior, and goal attainment are the three conditions addressed in motivation. To put it another way, the motivating event leads to behavior, and behavior leads to the objective. Motivational situations are referred as desire, ambition, wish, purpose, thirst, success, love, social approval, status, and other motivational states (Morgan et al., 2001). In this

study, personal desires, family, and job-prestige gain are identified as motivating factors. Students consider proving themselves, satisfying their families, having a good job and having prestige as the reasons for being successful. In the study by Soydan et al. (2012), successful high school students determined the reasons for being successful as having a good job, reaching the goal, meeting family expectations, being happy, self-development, and being appreciated. Wood et al. (2014) identified the motivational sources in the academic success of college students as career goals, proving others wrong, providing a good future for /herself/himself or her/his family, responsibility towards others (family, friends, children), and the student's interest in academic lessons.

One can claim that many people, processes and institutions have an impact on the success of students (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). In this research, it was found that the support that individuals receive from parents, teachers, and immediate surroundings play an important role on student success. The family factor, in particular, is viewed as a key factor. Families can also provide confidence, motivation, cooperation, and other forms of support in addition to financial support.

According to some researchers, family structure, family size, family income and job, among other factors, are considered important factors in an individual's success and integration into the social process (Burnett & Farkas, 2009; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, there are counter-arguments, with some claiming that the factors of student achievement are not necessarily income or social standing. However, the family functions 1) To create a home environment that encourages learning, 2) To have high expectations for their children's careers and success, and 3) To be more effective in their children's participation in their school and community education (Handerson & Berla, 1994).

In addition, it is seen that school and teacher support are also important in success. School facilities and teachers' effective learning environments and positive communication play an active role in success. Eratlı Şirin and Şahin (2020) determined that communication, guidance and support between instructors and students are effective on success. In another study, Frymier and Houser (2000) revealed that communication skills are some of the main predictors of learning and motivation. Lee (2007) stated that the trust relationship between teacher and student plays a vital role in school adjustment, academic motivation and performance.

In a synthesis study conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) and supporting the findings of the present study, it was reported that students who reported high parental involvement and teacher support at home and school had a higher score than students who reported low support.

The students who took part in the current study were found to have acquired support and cooperation from their peers and close circles. Kang (2005) discovered that academically good students communicate more closely with other students with academically strong. As a result, individuals' performance can be improved with the assistance of their peers.

In this study, it was discovered that successful students have a wide range of academic abilities. Academic skills are a set of habits of study, learning tactics and time management techniques that help students learn and absorb school lessons (Upson, 2023). Gogus and Gunes (2011) pointed out that it is important to develop students' study and time management skills in creating successful learning habits. According to the results of the current study, successful students know themselves in terms of academic skills, develop different study strategies unique to themselves, are active listeners in the classroom, give importance to listening to the lesson, develop various strategies to cope with difficult lessons, and have academic goals. In a meta-analysis study conducted at university level, Crede and Kuncel (2008) found that study skills, study habits, study attitudes, and study motivation were moderators in predicting students' academic success. A similar finding was found in a study conducted on secondary school students, and it was concluded that study habits positively affect academic achievement (Bıyıklı, 2017).

Research conducted by Benford and Gess-Newsome (2006) found that academic, career, or personal goals significantly influence student achievement. It is thought that the determination of learning goals facilitates or improves metacognition related to goal-oriented planning, monitoring

and evaluation processes. In other words, the individual directs his interest, effort and action to goal-related actions (Locke & Latham, 2006).

The students who faced with a main obstacle employed a variety of techniques, including working hard, dedicating more time, repeating the material, identifying their weaknesses, listening more intently, seeking support, and so on. This attribute can be explained by the internal locus of control, according to the attribution theory of motivation. Individuals who have an internal locus of control feel that their accomplishments and failures are the product of their own efforts and talents. It has been suggested that children with an internal locus of control are more academically successful, and that this is a significant determinant in predicting academic achievement (Albert & Dahling, 2016; Slavin, 2012).

It has been determined that successful students can adapt to new situations, are selective in taking on tasks and choosing friends, use technology according to their needs, have good relationships with their family, teachers, and friends, and have no problems with the people around them as a social skill. A study conducted by Koç et al. (2004) showed a significant correlation between students' GPA and family-related problems. In other words, the increase in students' family problems may cause a decrease in their GPA.

Considering the themes obtained in the research, it can be said that the themes of responsibility in success, motivation, academic skills and social skills are concepts related to individual internal factors. The theme of "support" can be considered as a factor outside the individual. In this case, it can be stated that individual characteristics are more effective on success. Similarly, a study conducted by Topçu and Uzundumlu (2012) revealed that the main determining factors in the academic success of students are themselves, and the faculty members and organizational structure are supporting factors.

Based on the results from this study, the following recommendations are made.

• Educational activities aimed at fostering a sense of responsibility in students from a young age may be highlighted as part of the educational process planning.

• Considering the importance of family support in student success, activities that will improve the understanding of parents can be planned.

• Activities that develop individual self-awareness, setting future goals and understanding about finding a job can be included in the training.

• Individuals' social skills can be improved through in-school and out-of-school practices.

• As a final recommendation, this study could be replicated with a larger sample and other education levels.

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