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PSYCHOLOGY PRODUCTION IN BRAZIL ON SCHOOL SUCCESS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

PRODUÇÃO DA PSICOLOGIA NO BRASIL SOBRE SUCESSO ESCOLAR: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA

LA PRODUCCIÓN DE LA PSICOLOGÍA EN BRASIL SOBRE EL ÉXITO ESCOLAR: UNA REVISIÓN SISTEMÁTICA

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ABSTRACT: This research presents an overview of how success has been investigated in school psychology research in Brazil. It was conducted according to the PRISMA methodological criteria. The following databases were consulted: SciELO, PePSIC, LILACS, Portal CAPES, and BVS-Saúde. The search was conducted using the following descriptors: 1) "psicologia" AND "sucesso escolar"; 2) "psicologia" AND "sucesso" AND "escola". The final corpus consists of 10 articles, organized into three categories. The studies that included student participation resulted in students attributing internal causes as determinants for school success, such as effort and intelligence. The studies that investigated the relationship between schools and teachers and school success concluded that the quality of teaching is essential for performance. It is suggested that work be done in schools: students' conceptions related to school success and the diversity of facets that produce performance.

KEYWORDS: Educational psychology. Academic success. Schools. Systematic review. Brazil.

RESUMO: A presente pesquisa apresenta um panorama de como o sucesso tem sido investigado nas pesquisas em psicologia escolar no Brasil. Foi realizada conforme os critérios metodológicos do PRISMA. Foram consultadas as bases: SciELO, PePSIC, LILACS, Portal CAPES e BVS-Saúde. A busca ocorreu por meio dos seguintes descritores: 1) “psicologia” AND “sucesso escolar”; 2) “psicologia” AND “sucesso” AND “escola”. O corpus final é composto por 10 artigos, organizados em três categorias. Os estudos que contaram com a participação dos alunos tiveram como resultado a atribuição, por parte destes, a causas internas como determinantes para o sucesso escolar, como o esforço e a inteligência. Os estudos que investigaram a relação da escola e dos professores com o sucesso escolar concluíram que a qualidade do ensino é essencial para o desempenho. Sugere-se trabalhar nas escolas as concepções dos estudantes relacionadas ao sucesso escolar e as facetas que o produzem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Psicologia educacional. Sucesso acadêmico. Escolas. Revisão sistemática. Brasil.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación presenta una visión general de cómo el éxito ha sido investigado en la investigación en psicología escolar en Brasil. Se realizó de acuerdo con los criterios metodológicos PRISMA. Se consultaron las siguientes bases de datos: SciELO, PePSIC, LILACS, Portal CAPES y BVS-Saúde. La búsqueda se realizó utilizando los siguientes descriptores: 1) “psicologia” AND “sucesso escolar”; 2) “psicologia” AND “sucesso” AND “escola”. El corpus final consta de 10 artículos, organizados en tres categorías. Los estudios que incluyeron la participación de estudiantes resultaron en su atribución a causas internas como determinantes del éxito académico, como el esfuerzo y la inteligencia. Los estudios que investigaron la relación entre las escuelas y los docentes y el éxito académico concluyeron que la calidad de la enseñanza es esencial para el desempeño. Se sugiere trabajar en las escuelas: las concepciones de los estudiantes relacionadas con el éxito académico y las facetas que el producen.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Psicología educativa. Éxito académico. Escuelas. Revisión sistemática. Brasil.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, a critical movement began to emerge within school psychology in Brazil, influenced by theoretical currents such as Historical-Cultural Psychology and Historical-Dialectical Materialism. According to these perspectives, human phenomena are primarily social—in other words, processes involved in human development, such as learning, are understood as sociogenic, meaning they originate from the individual's development through interaction with the social environment (Facci & Tavares, 2024; Vigotski, 2018).

Based on this approach, academic success and failure are not independent outcomes of the school, nor are they solely dependent on the student's internal aspects. Therefore, it is limiting to consider only students' grades as indicators of school success, especially when assessments are viewed as results of learning rather than as diagnostic tools in the teaching-learning process (Aguar Neto, 2020; Silva, 2023).

Contemporary Brazilian researchers in the field of school and educational psychology (Facci & Tavares, 2024; Negreiros, 2021; Scarin & Souza, 2020), in investigations on the interface between psychology and education, also consider the presence of an individualizing perspective on the teaching-learning process—particularly regarding academic success and failure—which is related to the phenomenon of the medicalization of education.

Given this context, the present systematic literature review aims to gather research in the field of School and Educational Psychology on the theme of Academic Success, with the purpose of presenting an overview of how academic success has been understood and investigated in Brazil.

METHODS

This is an exploratory-descriptive literature review focusing on academic success at the intersection with psychology. It was conducted following the methodological criteria of PRISMA-ScR (PRISMA extension for Scoping Reviews) (Mattos et al., 2023).

The methodological procedure for information collection was as follows: 1) Definition of the theme and formulation of the research problem; 2) Literature search and selection of descriptors; 3) Search in databases; 4) Extraction of articles according to inclusion and exclusion criteria; 5) Data analysis; 6) Presentation of results and publication.

The databases consulted were: BVS-Saúde, SciELO, PePSIC, LILACS, and CAPES Portal. The search was conducted by accessing the websites of these databases. The descriptors and Boolean operators used were in two forms: 1) “psicologia” AND “sucesso escolar”; 2) “psicologia” AND “sucesso” AND “escola”.

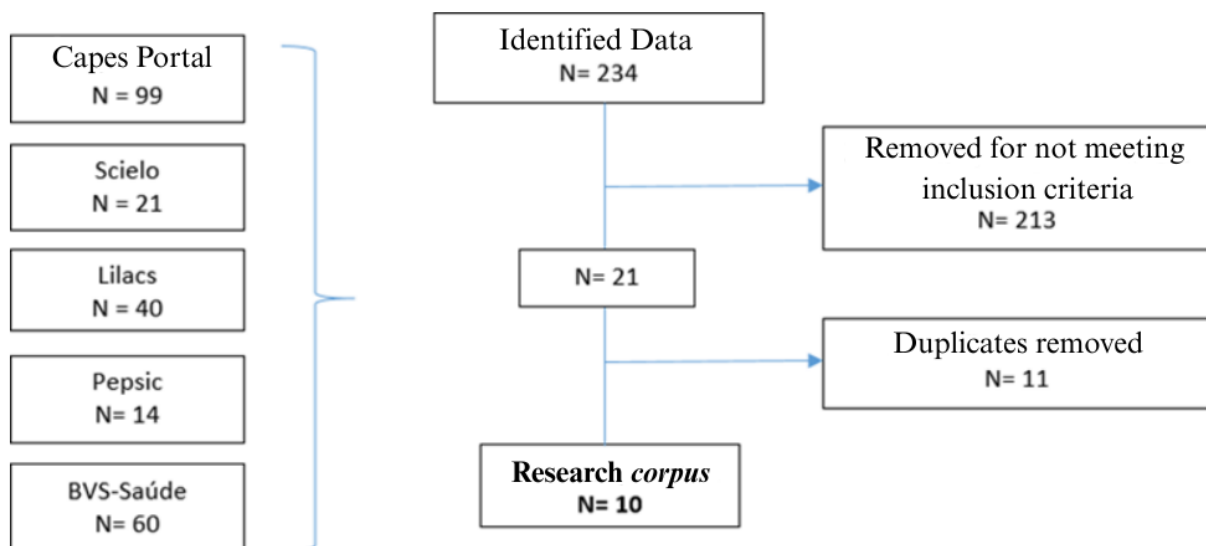
Inclusion criteria considered articles/dissertations/theses that: 1) address the theme of academic success in interface with Psychology; 2) were conducted in the Brazilian context; 3) regardless of year of publication; and 4) are freely available online. Exclusion criteria included: 1) studies that do not address themes related to psychology and academic success; 2) articles in foreign languages; 3) duplicates; 4) not freely available online. The searches were carried out between November and December 2023.

Regarding the timeline of the publications included in this review, the search covered studies published up to December 2023, noting that no starting date was set in order to include initial publications on the topic and thereby analyze the historical overview of how academic success has been investigated and understood by psychology in Brazil over different periods.

Results

A total of 234 studies were identified in the databases. Of these, 213 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria, and 11 were excluded due to duplication, resulting in a final sample of 10 selected studies, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the selection of studies in the databases



Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 1: Characterization of studies in the field of Psychology on academic success in Brazil retrieved from the databases

Author (Year)	Objective/Delineation	University (state/country)
Moro (1995)	To discuss the real possibilities of applying, in Brazilian schools, the knowledge already produced by Educational Psychology (qualitative).	Federal University of Paraná (Paraná/Brazil)
Ferreira et al. (2002)	To identify and compare the attribution patterns adopted by Brazilian, Argentine, and Mexican students when explaining their own academic success and failure, as well as that of other students attending their school, a different type of school, and a school in another country (quantitative).	Gama Filho University, National University of Rosario, Interamerican Open University, Juárez University of the State of Durango, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Estácio de Sá University (Transcultural study: Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico)
Silva (2003)	To discuss teachers' beliefs that shape their daily actions and influence their behavior, both in fostering academic success and in contributing to academic failure (qualitative).	University of São Paulo (São Paulo/Brazil)
Soares et al. (2004)	To present guidelines for parents to become promoters of the development of behaviors that facilitate their children's learning (qualitative).	State University of Londrina (Paraná/Brazil)
Chechia e Andrade (2005)	To identify in which areas the discourse of parents of successful students differs from that of parents of students with academic failure (qualitative).	University of São Paulo (São Paulo/ Brazil)
Riani and Rios-Neto (2008)	To investigate the determinants of educational outcomes in Brazil, considering factors related to family background and the school infrastructure of municipalities (quantitative).	Federal University of Minas Gerais (Minas Gerais/Brazil)
Paiva and Boruchovitch (2010)	To examine the motivational orientations, beliefs about effort, intelligence, luck, and the necessary conditions for achieving success in school, as well as the future expectations of overcoming poor academic performance among elementary school students (quantitative).	Federal University of São Carlos and University of Campinas (São Paulo/Brazil)
Garcia and Boruchovitch (2014)	To identify the causal attributions for academic success and failure, and resilience in elementary school students (quantitative).	State University of Campinas (Campinas/Brazil)
Garcia and Boruchovitch (2015)	To investigate the causal attributions for success and failure, and to analyze the existence of relationships between these causal attributions and variables such as gender, grade repetition, age, and educational attainment (quantitative).	State University of Campinas (Campinas/Brazil)
Damasceno and Negreiros (2018)	To identify and discuss the knowledge developed by teachers about their role in both academic success and failure (qualitative).	Federal University of Piauí (Piauí/Brazil)

Source: prepared by the authors.

Four studies (Ferreira et al., 2002; Garcia & Boruchovitch, 2014, 2015; Paiva & Boruchovitch, 2010) investigated students' causal attributions regarding academic success, aiming

to identify how students understand school performance, particularly the phenomenon of academic success.

Four studies focused on school-related factors—the functioning of the Brazilian school system, school infrastructure, and, especially, the teaching staff and quality of education—as determinants of academic success (Damasceno & Negreiros, 2018; Moro, 1995; Riani & Rios-Neto, 2008; Silva, 2003).

Two studies (Chechia & Andrade, 2005; Soares et al., 2004) examined the relationship between two spheres—family and educational institution—and their influence on academic success, aiming to encourage family support as a key factor in the effectiveness of school practices. Methodologically, there was a balance between qualitative and quantitative approaches, with 50% of the studies employing a quantitative approach and the other 50% using a qualitative approach.

DISCUSSION

Based on the systematic review process, it was possible to identify three categories of analysis: Category 1: “The student as responsible for academic success: individualizing a multidetermined issue”; Category 2: “Teaching promotes academic success: The essential role of the educational system and teachers”; Category 3: “The family participates in the production of academic success.”

Category 1: “The student as responsible for academic success: individualizing a multidetermined issue”

This category of analysis comprises four articles: Ferreira et al. (2002), Paiva and Boruchovitch (2010), Garcia and Boruchovitch (2014), and Garcia and Boruchovitch (2015). Table 2 presents the main findings of the respective studies, followed by the discussion.

Table 2: Main results of category 1 articles

Author (year)	Main results
Ferreira et al. (2002)	The basic cause to which Mexican, Argentine, and Brazilian students refer when explaining their own academic performance and that of other students is effort, followed by ability, especially when it comes to explaining academic success.
Paiva and Boruchovitch (2010)	For students, effort and intelligence are highly important factors for academic success (100% respectively). It was also found that students predominantly considered both effort and intelligence as aspects acquired throughout life, internal, and unstable.

Garcia and Boruchovitch (2014)	The students in the sample of this study reported attributing internal and controllable causes to academic performance in both success and failure situations.
Garcia and Boruchovitch (2015)	The students predominantly presented internal and controllable causes as justifications for academic success and failure, taking responsibility for their performance. Students with no history of grade repetition attributed academic success and failure more to internal and controllable factors when compared to students with a history of grade repetition.

Source: prepared by the authors.

The study conducted by Ferreira et al. (2002) compared the attributional mechanisms used by Brazilian, Argentine, and Mexican students when explaining academic success and failure. The sample comprised 1,594 students with either good or poor academic performance, who responded to a questionnaire about the causes of their performance, that of their peers, students from different types of schools (public or private), and students from other countries.

The basic cause to which Mexican, Argentine, and Brazilian students refer when explaining their own academic performance and that of other students—whether they are successful or unsuccessful, study in public or private schools, and belong to their own country or another—is effort, followed by ability, especially when it comes to explaining academic success.

Paiva and Boruchovitch (2010) aimed to investigate motivational orientations, beliefs about effort, intelligence, and luck, as well as the necessary conditions for achieving success in school. The study, which yielded similar results to that of Ferreira et al. (2002), involved 120 elementary school students.

The article by Garcia and Boruchovitch (2014) aimed to analyze the causal attributions for academic success and failure and resilience in elementary school students, as well as to check if there are relationships between these constructs in the sample. The study involved 275 students from the 5th to the 9th grade of a public school.

Data were collected through two Likert-type scales. As in the other two studies described above, the students in this study's sample also reported attributing internal and controllable causes to academic performance, for both success and failure situations.

Garcia and Boruchovitch (2015) used the same sample as the study described above, with the goal of identifying causal attributions for academic success and failure, as well as verifying whether there were relationships between these attributions and variables such as gender, grade repetition, age, and schooling.

Data were collected through a Demographic Questionnaire and a Causal Attribution Scale for Academic Success and Failure. The students predominantly presented internal and controllable causes as justifications for academic success and failure, revealing a tendency to take responsibility for their performance. It was observed that, in general, students without a

history of grade repetition attributed their academic performance more to internal and controllable factors when compared to students with a history of failure.

The four studies in this category had as their sample students who participated in the research through a quantitative research method, investigating the causes they attributed to academic success, whether internal and/or external. The studies presented internal causes, particularly effort and intelligence/ability, as the main results.

All four studies followed a quantitative design and obtained the students' perspectives regarding the causes of their own academic performance, whether good or poor, as well as that of others. The scenario found in schools—of attributing individual causes to a broad phenomenon—may reflect a segment of the broader social macrosystem, in which larger issues tend to be explained through an individualistic lens (Duarte, 2012).

The critical perspective in school psychology seeks, among its aims, to overcome the individualization of school-related complaints, so that what occurs within the educational environment is perceived and addressed collectively, given its multidetermined nature. The results of these studies, in which students indicate that they hold themselves responsible for their success—mainly produced by their own effort and ability—serve as a warning, suggesting that the critical perspective may not yet have reached the primary users of the educational service: the students.

Category 2: "Teaching promotes academic success: the essential role of the educational system and teachers"

This category of analysis includes four articles: Moro (1995), Silva (2003), Riani and Rios-Neto (2008), and Damasceno and Negreiros (2018). Table 3 presents the main findings of the aforementioned studies.

Table 3: Main results of category 2 articles

Author (year)	Main results
Moro (1995)	Discussion that the phenomenon of school failure in Brazilian basic education is not a failure of the student, but rather of the school system, which fails to provide high-quality education to the majority of the population. The author highlights the school's inability to promote meaningful learning that recognizes and leverages the competencies of children regardless of their socioeconomic status, particularly in the case of students from low-income families.
Silva (2003)	Teachers need time to reflect on their practice, as well as to learn how to investigate the causes of problems in the classroom, by reflecting on certain types of knowledge that do not lead to academic success.

Riani and Rios-Neto (2008)	A substitution effect was identified between maternal education and the quality factors of the school network in the municipalities. Educational success no longer depends on the student's social background, but rather on the quality of the school instruction.
Damasceno and Negreiros (2018)	The main role highlighted by the teachers in this study was that of mediators of teaching and learning, with a significant contribution to the formation of students as individuals.

Source: prepared by the authors.

The theoretical study published by Moro (1995) reflects on the real possibilities of applying, in Brazilian schools, the knowledge already produced by Educational Psychology. The author leads the discussion by defending the idea that the phenomenon of school failure in Brazilian basic education is not a failure of the student, but rather of the school system, due to its failure to offer high-quality education to the majority of the population.

Moro (1995) discusses the school's inability to promote meaningful learning that recognizes and harnesses children's competencies, regardless of their socioeconomic background, especially in the case of students from low-income families.

Factors such as political instability, the absence of mechanisms for evaluating the quality of the education system, and the lack of information available to civil society—so it can exert pressure on governments and demand the quality education to which it is entitled—were identified by the author as contributors to the discussed situation of system failure.

Moro (1995) points out that the field of School and Educational Psychology already possesses a body of valid and applicable knowledge capable of transforming the school qualitatively; however, the difficulties lie in how to implement this knowledge in the everyday school context.

The study conducted by Damasceno and Negreiros (2018) aimed to understand the knowledge teachers have constructed regarding their role in school failure. This was a qualitative, ex post facto study involving 562 teachers, who responded to the question: What is the role of the teacher in school success/failure?

In the data analysis, the class labeled "The teacher's role in school failure" accounted for 52.29% of the corpus, thus showing the highest level of significance. The words most closely related to this class refer to the need for teachers to constantly seek new practices in an effort to combat failure.

The results found in Silva (2003) confirm the data found in the other articles in this category, indicating through a field study with a group of schoolteachers that teachers need time to reflect on their practice, as well as to learn how to investigate the causes of classroom problems.

The study by Riani and Rios-Neto (2008) found a substitution effect between maternal education and the quality factors of municipal school networks, such that an improvement in

the quality of education provides equal educational opportunities for students. Educational success, understood in this research as the likelihood of attending school at the correct age, becomes less dependent on the student's social background and more reliant on the quality of school education. The data were drawn from the 2000 Demographic Census (IBGE) and the 2000 School Census (Inep).

The results of the four studies that comprise this category of analysis are encouraging in demonstrating the practical effects of the critical perspective in school psychology. They propose an analysis of school complaints—especially academic performance—based on an expanded approach to understanding the factors that generate outcomes. This includes the school and teachers—the teaching dimension—as the channel that leads to learning, which is measured by performance.

They incorporate the educational system and the physical and human structure of the teaching-learning process, emphasizing the role of teaching and its importance for academic success. This approach transcends individual and familial origin factors, relying on the power of teaching to foster learning and school achievement. This aspect is underscored in Historical-Cultural Psychology, which asserts that development occurs through learning, which itself is shaped by mediation. Thus, the school institution is highlighted as a fundamental mediator in the teaching-learning process (Borgez & Morais, 2024; Saviani, 2015).

Category 3: “The Family Contributes to the Production of Academic Success”

Two articles comprise the third category of analysis—Soares et al. (2004) and Chechia and Andrade (2005)—and the main findings are presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Main findings of the articles in Category 3

Author (year)	Main results
Soares, Souza and Marinho (2004)	Parental involvement in their children's academic life should be encouraged, due to the benefits it can bring to academic success.
Chechia and Andrade (2005)	Regarding academic performance, both the parents of successful students and those of unsuccessful students attribute reasons related to the responsibility of the child, the teacher, and also the family itself.

Source: prepared by the authors.

Soares et al. (2004) start from the assumption that children's cognitive development is a task shared between family and school. The authors point out that parental involvement in their children's academic life should be encouraged due to the benefits it can bring to academic success. They present guidelines for parents to promote the development of behaviors that facilitate learning and allow for active participation in their children's academic lives, such

as: making children's rights and responsibilities explicit, relating theory to practice, and supervising activities.

The study conducted by Chechia and Andrade (2005) investigated parents' perceptions of their children's academic performance, analyzing the content of semi-structured interviews with 32 parents—16 parents of students with successful performance and the rest, parents of students with low academic achievement.

Regarding school performance, both the parents of successful students and those of unsuccessful students attribute reasons related to the responsibility of the child, the teacher, and the family itself. The results highlight that the family should foster an appreciation for the school and assist with school tasks, while the school needs to review its values and procedures regarding the student and the family.

This category highlights the perspective that school performance results from what is produced within a network: school-family-student. Thus, the ideas proposed by Soares et al. (2004) support the notion that the family can participate in the process of producing academic success, without, however, being the main party responsible, as this would lead to the over-responsibilization of the family for a factor that is multidetermined.

The articles in Categories 2 and 3 complement each other in discussing sources of academic success that are external to students, a reality far removed from that described by the students in Category 1, where they point to internal characteristics as the primary generators of success.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the Systematic Literature Review presented in this article, it was possible to provide an overview of how academic success has been investigated and understood by psychology in Brazil. All the studies addressed the topic with the aim of understanding and discussing the causes that lead to academic success.

The studies with students revealed that they refer to their own effort and ability/intelligence as the source of their success, rather than considering a multidetermined and non-individualizing perspective for understanding school phenomena. The latter is advocated by the critical perspective in school psychology, which aligns with the findings of the studies in Categories 2 and 3, which investigated factors beyond the internal characteristics of students in the production of academic performance.

It is proposed that studies be conducted to investigate the perspectives of students, teachers, and families, not in isolation as in the articles found in this review, but in a comple-

mentary manner, in order to more concretely reflect, from a methodological standpoint, the critical perspective in school psychology.

This study was limited by a small number of research papers in the corpus. Therefore, it is suggested that future systematic reviews include a larger number of databases or use other descriptors to expand the corpus and thereby broaden the overview of investigations found.

In light of the results of this study, it is recommended that the theme of academic success be addressed in schools through projects, interdisciplinary practices, school psychology interventions, and continuing education for education professionals on topics related to the schooling process. The goal of these actions is to address conceptions related to the causes of academic success, highlighting the diversity of factors that produce school performance and emphasizing the shared responsibility of society, school, family, and students in the production of academic success.

Finally, the current overview of research on academic success in Brazil may support critical practices for school psychologists and serve as a theoretical reference for the development of public education policies aimed at improving education, by promoting resources that ensure school infrastructure and the quality of teaching, both of which are essential for academic success.

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CRediT Author Statement

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