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# CO- RELATIONAL REVIEW INTERFACE BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

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## Abstract

The performance of real life achievers vis-à-vis academic achievers has long been a subject of debate and discussion. It has often been witnessed that real life achievers often do not

possess remarkable academic credentials, though this is not always the case. Conversely, it is seen that a strong academic record does not always translate into professional success. All the same, there are countless examples of personalities who possess both- a remarkable academic track-record as well as a string of professional achievements. This study focuses on the nature of both kinds of “successes” as well as how they are perceived at the societal and the individual level. The researchers have attempted to illustrate their observations and findings by way of examples taken from real life. What constitutes success and how it is judged or gauged in terms of academic achievement and professional career is the underlying theme of this paper.

**Keywords:** *Academic Achievement; Academic Credentials; Real Life Performance; Career; Individual Satisfaction; Professional Success.*

### **An Overview**

*"Money or the ability to make it doesn't impress anybody around here."*

-Mark Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*

*"The ladder of success is best climbed by stepping on the rungs of opportunity."*

-Ayn Rand

*"To achieve, you need thought. You have to know what you are doing and that's real power."*

-Ayn Rand

What constitutes success? Before we venture to ask this vexed question, it becomes necessary to analyse what success is. Thus, arriving at a proper definition becomes imperative to proceed further. The Oxford Dictionary defines success as:

- a) the achieving of desired results, and
- b) something that achieves positive results.

Some more definitions are needed to clear the air:

- a) a level of social status
- b) achievement of an objective/goal
- c) the opposite of failure (*accessed from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Success>*)

Now that we have more or less idea of the concept of success, we will try to dwell upon the nature as well as the different aspects of success. The researchers opine that success is basically of two types:

- a) Individual
- b) Societal

The first pertains to the success one achieves at a personal/individual level while the latter refers to the notions a particular society harbours towards the idea of success. Thus while pursuing music for the sake of it might constitute success for a person obsessed with, say, jazz, the typical Indian society at large would consider him a failure, or to put it mildly, dismiss him as an unsuccessful and worthless outcast. However, professions like medicine and engineering would find ready approval and acceptance in Indian society (that is the picture in most third world nations, as a rule).

Also, success depends on how an individual perceives it. For some, money is the be all and end all of success and it depends on how much wealth one rakes in. This attitude is common not just in “materialistic” western societies but also in neo-industrialised/industrialising Asian nations such as India and China, which traditionally laid more emphasis on personal virtues rather than accumulation of wealth. Thus a person’s worth is more often gauged by his bank balance than anything. Though, we can also assert that this is not always the case.

Success might also constitute doing “one’s own thing”. Some persons who are fixated with a particular inspiration will consider themselves successful only if they get to do it. Success in any other field will not constitute *success* for them but they will just dismiss that either as a fluke or serendipity. The example of the musician given above amply illustrates our point. He’ll consider himself successful only if he pursues his avocation even if it does not translate into monetary rewards. Achievement lies in self-satisfaction for some.

Correlation means having a mutual relationship. This may be between two variables. Herein the two variables are:

1. Academic performance
2. Professional success

It cannot be said that an excellent academic performance is the basis for professional success; conversely, it also cannot be said that a poor academic record leads to professional success.

Perhaps we need to find a middle ground. However, there is a maxim which amply summarizes a universal fact: *all work no play makes jack a dull boy*.

A very basic question is often asked: Why does one has to undergo school for a minimum of twelve years? A common and most expected answer is that schools are where one learns, at least in the traditional pattern of education. Education though, is seen less as a learning process, but more as a rat race. The early bird gets the most of it. Folk wisdom suggests early inception to school education builds one-upmanship for a kid, academically speaking. This cannot be completely verified or refuted in absolute terms. We believe that the importance of education cannot be stressed enough, but there must be more scope for learning through 'fun'. The sad fact however is that experiential study and do-it-yourself approach has mostly given way to a very straitjacketed academic approach to learning. Students are expected to excel academically well so as to secure admission in prestigious colleges thereby escalating stress and workload to often shocking levels. Thus they are forced to adopt a rote based learning approach and a focus more on remembering facts and figures rather than doing anything fruitful or practical. This kills the spirit of enquiry and hunger for innovation. So much for our modern academic theories and models!

Education for most of us has been (and still is) a dull affair. What we need is an optimum mix of education and fun. What books cannot teach can be learned by way of academic games. Let us not create human equivalent of robots and computers who though can store a variety of data, can never do anything innovative on their own. A focus on extracurricular activities shall lead to a better development of an individual's personality. Also, it can prove to be a good outlet to unwind and remove pent-up stress.

An individual needs encouragement to follow his or her dreams. An education which is too much structurized and narrow in its approach cannot cultivate aspirations freely. It is vital that we let students chart their own course rather than forcing them to go down the beaten track. A road less travelled is often the most rewarding one.

### **Interrelation Of Academic Aptitude With Professional Acquaintance**

In what way academics correlate with professional aptitude? What connection do the two share? This is the vexed question the researchers will try to answer. For this purpose let us try

to understand what motivates a person to excel academically. An individual, as is mostly seen, is motivated to strive for academic excellence for basically two reasons. First being the quest for knowledge and information. Many people direct their endeavour towards academics because they wish to acquire as much knowledge as they can in their chosen line of study. Such people are likely to be highly focused and stop at nothing but the very best level of knowledge in their preferred field. These individuals also tend to be highly focused and self-disciplined. Secondly, people try to excel academically so as to increase their chances of getting a good employment. This being a very pragmatic reason, and divorced from the ideal of 'knowledge for knowledge's sake', is a very utilitarian approach. Most individuals who are like this happen to be smart-workers, self-disciplined, methodical and display a high degree of ambition. We see that academics relates with profession in this respect and becomes a vehicle for future professional success.

It is generally observed that being studious since the onset of education or becoming one at some other stage of acquiring formal education leads to self-discipline and begets a systematic approach towards learning. This habit is most likely to be continued to professional domain from student life. This induces the individual to carry over the same attributes he developed as a student in professional life, viz., self-discipline, methodical approach, focus and ambition. This has often more to do with a subconscious force of habit rather than any deliberate thinking. Winning becomes a habit for such individuals. Success breeds even more success in such cases.

On the other side of the spectrum, we also witness that those individuals who failed to perform well academically in their student days often fail to develop the much needed qualities of self discipline, diligence, a passion for hard work, and so forth. They also often display a clear lack of ambition. This, in turn inhibits them from succeeding professionally in two ways: First, they often do not have the same innate drive for success as their academically achieving counterparts, not to mention the constant dilemma about the choice of career. Secondly, since they lack what it takes to excel, they most of the time have a slow career growth. Thus we can argue that the seeds of future success are laid in the very beginning. Taking our argument further, we can assert that an individual's professional success in later part of his life is more or less determined by how he performed at school/college in academic terms.

It is now we realise that there exists a paradox: we have examples of individuals who did not performed well academically but did exceptionally well in their chosen line of profession. What explains this paradox, or shall we say, aberration? We are at liberty to dismiss this observation as stray exceptions but the dictum 'exception proves the rule' perhaps cannot be positively applied in this context. The examples of good number of industrialists, sportspersons, politicians, film stars, and many others seem to betray our prior asserted observations. These individuals often had hopeless performances at school and might have been decried as incompetent and a failure, but they beat the odds and proved themselves when they got the right opportunity. This phenomenon cannot be explained away as sheer luck of such individuals. We suspect that there is more to it than meets the eye and that needs to be found out.

### **Societal Perceivability Vs. Platform/ Spot Familiarity**

The way society perceives success differs drastically in different cultural contexts. What might count as success in a developed western society might be construed as being little in an Asian society. Thus while 'doing one's thing' without making much money might be favourably looked on in a developed nation, it might be frowned upon in India due to cash-deficit status of the individual. However as a general rule, the capacity to earn money generally becomes the overriding factor in determining what constitutes success in most cultures. Also the respectability of the profession, determines whether the individual has a successful career or not. Those who go into less reputable but more lucrative professions/business might not be seen as much successful by a chunk of the society.

Societies in developing nations mostly lay much emphasis on the wealth-generating capacity of an individual. In the context of India, we find this to be very much true. In India, a person who could not excel academically but has a flourishing career which enables him to rake in respectable sums of money will be considered successful in almost all aspects. The reason behind this being not the overly materialistic nature of Indian society but rather the low income levels prevailing across the nation. His academic record would not count for much as the ultimate aim of education is often seen as finding a good job and earning at least a decent salary. If this could be attained without a good academic record, the importance of education automatically diminishes.

However, not all sections of society think along similar lines. In families which have produced intellectuals or who understand the value of education, such thinking is looked down upon. With the increase of literacy in absolute terms in countries like India, and particularly among lower-middle classes and poorer sections of society, parents have begun to understand the value of education and have begun to send their children to at least half decent schools. Thus the number of literates has shot up dramatically in India. With this change in societal perspective towards education, academics is being considered as the catalyst for economic change. Even students from poor families with no history of education consider it necessary to perform well academically to improve their lot. An excellent academic record is regarded as the royal road to career advancement.

Good education in India is still expensive, both at the school and university level, in many institutions reputed for quality. To study in a prestigious seat of learning is the dream of every student. Due to overwhelming number of aspirants, admission into such institutions is extremely difficult to get, and competition is fierce, to put it in mild terms. The degrees awarded by such institutions are much coveted and almost invariably lead to high paying jobs. This prompts aspirants to maintain impressive academic credentials so that they might succeed in “getting there”. Thus the cult of ‘education for money’ continues. The link between academic success and professional success is firmly established in this scenario.

In all this, often the child is the one who does not get to do what he really wants. Because of ruthless competition and rush for better paying jobs, as well as the tag of “respectability” attached to them, parents often pressurise their kids from the very onset of education to aim for these jobs. In a country like India where the concept of personal space does not carry much significance, it is very common for parents to push their kids to follow a dream which is not their own. Thus children are often found studying (and often excelling in) subjects in which they neither have any interest nor can they relate to. Their dreams are often made fun of, dismissed as immature, and trampled down if they do not fit into the little vision of their parents. All this in the name of their future!

Herein lies a dilemma: to do what earns money and a secure future or what one feels one has talent and aptitude for. Ideally speaking, one should have the freedom to choose his vocation according to one’s talent, skills and aptitude. In the real world, unfortunately that does not happen most of the time. When there is an acute financial crunch and poverty is rampant, following one’s heart sounds like a utopian ideal. So, what usually happens is that kids are

forced to enter a field of study which will ultimately prepare them for a line of work they do not have the heart for. This though makes sense to most sections of society as nobody wants their children to do something which does not fetch a good income. All efforts towards educating a child are directed towards money making. Earning money is the be all and end all of education, for most if not all parents.

Why society endorses this is more than clear by now. The two important sets of persons which define a student's academic efforts are two: parents, and peers. While parents have already a set mindset and opinion about the line of career their ward should follow, what his friends and other children of similar age are doing matter a lot. If they are all preparing for a particular academic/vocational course, chances are high that he will also opt for it. Peer pressure and influence is very high in such cases. Also, pressure and opinion of teachers, influential figures, and society at large contributes in a large way to a student's choice of career.

### **Academic Success Does Not Always Equate To Success In Life**

#### **“Our Past is not Your Future”**

*"The past has no power over the present moment."*

-Eckhart Tolle

*"No matter where you are in life right now, no matter who you are, no matter how old you are – it is never too late to be who you are meant to be."*

- Esther & Jerry Hicks

*"While brilliant students were not amongst those who were the most successful, failures were not either".*

*"Realise deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the NOW the primary focus of your life."*

-Eckhart Tolle (The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment)

*"Formal education will make you a living; self-education will make you a fortune."*

-Jim Rohn



Is there any relationship between grades and future success? This is a question that haunts all discussions about life, education and career. Do high scorers, particularly those who fight for each mark; really go on to become super successful?

Academic performance is not the best, or even a good indicator, of success in life because it does not fairly measure various qualities of an individual such as personality, leadership potential, drive, creativity etc. Evidence is best lent by understanding what "success in life" means. If money, the ability to move technology barriers, and shaping of the world are metrics, consider the number of people who were academic failures or dropouts at one point in their lives. Examples include Albert Einstein, Bill Gates (Microsoft founder), Mark Zuckerberg (*Facebook founder*), Larry Ellison (co-founder of Oracle), David Cote (CEO of Honeywell), and Scott Walker (governor of Wisconsin). The world is full of academic "failures" who have succeeded in various endeavours. 10-15 years after one has left school no one really cares about your performance in high school or college. They look for a good work history and your ability to make a meaningful impact on their business. Will you make them money or not? That is what matters. Academic aptitude isn't always a true indicator of future success.

A study revealed that good academic scoring at school does not guarantee success in later life and nor does poor performance in school necessarily mean failure. Due to parental and societal pressures, students try to score high marks in school. An even more interesting finding was that 88.4 per cent of the successful people were not products of elite schools. And 60 per cent of them were from a vernacular background.

It is not simply a college degree that makes or breaks a successful person; it takes much more than that. How many times were you told to make sure you worked hard in high school so you could go to college and get a good career job? Perhaps not all of us got nagged about it, but probably a good portion of today's generation did.

It's natural to wonder whether college really necessary. A college degree, as many have found, is no guarantee of a good career. On the flipside, there are many successful personalities who didn't need their college education to excel in professionally. Some popular examples will suffice:

- **Michael Dell:** with \$1,000, dedication and desire, Michael Dell dropped out of college at the age of 19 to start PC's Limited, later named Dell, Inc.
- **Walt Disney:** Having dropped out of high school at 16, Walt Disney's career and accomplishments are astounding. The most influential animator, Disney holds the record for the most awards and nominations. The Walt Disney's company now has annual revenue of \$30 billion.
- **Henry Ford:** At 16, Henry Ford left home to apprentice as a machinist. He later started Ford Motor Company to manufacture automobiles.
- **Bill Gates:** Ranked as the world's richest person from 1995-2006, Bill Gates was a college drop out. He started the world's largest computer software company, Microsoft Corporation.
- **Steve Jobs:** Another glowing example in the software industry. After attending one semester of college, Jobs worked for Atari before co-founding Apple computers. Apple's impressive product line-up includes path-breaking and innovative iPod, iTunes online music store, iPhone and the most recent sensation iPad.
- **Dhiru Bhai Ambani:** He said, "Please understand, to have success traditionally, you require education or money or family background; and I did not have any of these three," He came from a village that is not even a dot on the political map of Gujarat state in India. And he simply could not go in for higher education simply because there was no money in the family kitty. Later on he went to found the most awe-inspiring name in Indian industry, *Reliance*.
- **Sachin Tendulkar:** Indian cricket legend, he has studied only till high school, he has a slew of cricketing records in his name. He is generally considered the best batsman ever and the most successful one as well.

The researchers believe that education is absolutely not necessary to be successful in life but it is definitely a fail-safe. Formal education is to be encouraged for its obvious benefits but let us not consider it to be the only driver for professional growth and advancement.

### **Recommendations For Improving Individual Professional Productivity**

Professional productivity does not only come from your academic records. Academic records are not the only criteria for assessing the one's success in professional life. It is the talent, diligence, optimistic attitude and encouragement from others that accounts for success. Principal performers are those people who make their work look effortless and directed towards one aim, committed, interested and achieve positive results.

We have many examples in front of us who academically did not go well but performed well professionally. But this observation does not apply to all. This is an intellectual gift, and only a few are blessed with it.

But practically in our career and work, being exceptionally good implies an attitude towards us and commitment to excellence. If we have firm faith on our capabilities then we are on the path to success. Our aptitude to recognise our strengths, work upon them, to be genuine about our advancement and ameliorate them, make us star.

To excel in professional life, you should be confident, achievement oriented, abide that you will make some mistakes and will not win every deal .you should be able to put life in balance and that imparts to being very efficacious with hours you do work. Most successful people do not have very high IQ levels because they were not on the extremity of their academic scores, they work arduously and made the most of their flair.

Now let's through a light on some basic rules to proceed:

- Develop an outlook to take small steps. Don't bother about what your work is; break it into small chunks to stick on the path. Try to keep yourself up-to-date in your area of interest and grab all the opportunities that come to you.
- Be proactive in your approach. Try to do the things which are related with your goals and avoid unnecessary activities which are hurdles in your path. Being proactive rather than reactive leads to success.

- Plan, prioritise, and execute your work on the basis of its importance rather than urgency. Intelligence to evaluate your task exemplifies your character values, carry you towards goals, and cultivate the roles and relationships. Prioritisation is the decisive part of the success of any business or in any walk of life.
- Incorporate the strength by way of positive team work, so as to accomplish goals no one could have done in isolation i.e. supportive leadership, because every individual is an expert of something and not everything. Positive potential in unison gives better results.
- One should be directed on the revitalisation of one's self in order to be a better human being and upgrade one's skills as well.

Last, but not the least, however, if you believe in yourself and have faith in your area of interest, then you will surely achieve success over time, and other will also acknowledge it and also in long run you will find that your career caters you well.

### **Conclusion With Invitation For Further Reviews To Future Researchers**

This is more than obvious that academic achievement and professional success share a connection. We have seen in many cases that academic success in early life prepares the groundwork for future professional success. Many people owe their present career growth to the spirit of discipline and an obsession for hard work they developed during their student years. Conversely, there are examples with us of persons who never excelled academically, but made a success of themselves in the professional domain. In this context, we are confronted with the obvious question: Is there a connection between the two or not? The answer though eludes us.

Perhaps the two shares a connection in many cases, and our study analysis shows that the two are independent of each other too, in a good number of cases. Thus to provide a straitjacketed opinion/conclusion in this context is not possible. Thus, the question remains unresolved as of now. The researchers invite future studies on this topic which might shed light on this vexed issue and provide some more definitive and plausible conclusions and answers.

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