

**Relationship between academic engagement, academic satisfaction, and employment among Argentine nursing students****Relación entre compromiso académico, satisfacción académica y actividad laboral en estudiantes de enfermería argentinos****Relação entre engajamento acadêmico, satisfação acadêmica e atividade laboral em estudantes de enfermagem argentinos**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To analyze the relationship between academic engagement, academic satisfaction, and employment among first-year Nursing students at two private institutions in 2024. **Methodology:** Descriptive, analytical, comparative, cross-sectional study. The sample included first-year Nursing students selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Academic engagement was measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and academic satisfaction with the Academic Satisfaction Scale, both adapted for Argentine students. Employment status was assessed using a sociodemographic questionnaire. All instruments were administered digitally, analyzing the data in June 2024 through SPSS. The project was approved by a Research Ethics Committee, and students provided informed consent. **Results:** Fifty-six students participated, 78.6% female, with a mean age of 22.04 years (SD = 4.84). Of the participants, 53.6% (n = 30) were employed, working in average 27.07 hours per week (SD = 18.71). A positive and statistically significant correlation was found between academic engagement and academic satisfaction (p < 0.01), in its dimensions of vigor (rho = 0.465), dedication (rho = 0.526), and absorption (rho = 0.418). Although employed students had

scored lower in academic engagement (Vigor Mdn = 3.30 vs. 3.70; Dedication Mdn = 4 vs. 4.80; Absorption Mdn = 2.63 vs. 3.50) and higher in academic satisfaction (Mdn = 6 vs. 5.58), these differences were not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** The employment status of students did not negatively impact academic engagement or satisfaction, suggesting that integrating work and academic responsibilities could benefit their development in early stages of their academic trajectory.

**Keywords:** Students, Nursing; Nursing Education Research; Psychology, Positive; Psychology, Educational.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar la relación entre el compromiso académico, la satisfacción académica y la actividad laboral en estudiantes de primer año de la carrera de Enfermería en dos instituciones privadas durante el año 2024. **Metodología:** Estudio descriptivo, analítico, comparativo, transversal. La muestra se integró por estudiantes de primer año de la carrera de Enfermería, muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia. El compromiso académico se midió con el cuestionario Utrecht-Work Compromiso Scale, la satisfacción académica con la Escala de Satisfacción Académica, ambos adaptados en estudiantes universitarios argentinos, y la actividad laboral con un cuestionario sociodemográfico; aplicados mediante un formulario digital en junio del 2024. El análisis se realizó con el programa SPSS. **Resultados:** Participaron 56 estudiantes, el 78,6% de sexo femenino, la edad promedio fue de 22,04 años (DS=4,84). El 53,6% (n=30) trabajaba un promedio de 27,07 (DS=18,71) horas semanales. Se obtuvo una correlación positiva y estadísticamente significativa entre el compromiso académico, en sus dimensiones vigor ( $\rho=0,465$ ), dedicación ( $\rho=0,526$ ) y absorción ( $\rho=0,418$ ), con satisfacción académica ( $p<0,01$ ). Aunque los estudiantes que trabajaban mostraron puntajes menores en el compromiso académico (vigor Mdn= 3,30 vs 3,70; dedicación Mdn= 4 vs 4,80; absorción Mdn=2,63 vs 3,50) y mayores en satisfacción académica (Mdn= 6 vs 5,58), estas diferencias no fueron estadísticamente significativas ( $p>0,05$ ). **Conclusiones:** La actividad laboral de los estudiantes no afectó negativamente su compromiso ni su satisfacción académica, lo que sugiere que la integración de responsabilidades laborales y académicas podría beneficiar el desarrollo de los estudiantes de enfermería en esta etapa inicial de su trayectoria académica.

**Palabras claves:** Estudiantes de Enfermería; Investigación en Educación de Enfermería; Psicología Positiva; Psicología Educativa.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar a relação entre comprometimento acadêmico, satisfação acadêmica e atividade laboral em estudantes do primeiro ano de enfermagem de duas instituições privadas durante o ano de 2024. **Metodologia:** Estudo descritivo, analítico, comparativo, transversal. A amostra foi composta por estudantes do primeiro ano de enfermagem, amostragem não probabilística por conveniência. O comprometimento acadêmico foi medido com o questionário Utrecht-Work Commitment Scale, a satisfação acadêmica com a Escala de Satisfação Acadêmica, ambas adaptadas para estudantes universitários argentinos, e a atividade laboral com um questionário sociodemográfico; aplicado por meio de formulário digital em junho de 2024. A análise foi realizada no programa SPSS. **Resultados:** participaram 56 estudantes, 78,6% do sexo feminino, a média de idade foi de 22,04 anos (DP=4,84). 53,6% (n=30) trabalhavam em média 27,07 (DP=18,71) horas semanais. Obteve-se correlação positiva e estatisticamente significativa entre o comprometimento acadêmico, em suas dimensões vigor ( $\rho=0,465$ ), dedicação ( $\rho=0,526$ ) e absorção ( $\rho=0,418$ ), com a satisfação acadêmica ( $p<0,01$ ). Embora os estudantes trabalhadores tenham apresentado pontuações mais baixas no comprometimento acadêmico (Mdn vigor= 3,30 vs 3,70; Mdn dedicação= 4 vs 4,80; Mdn absorção=2,63 vs 3,50) e maiores pontuações na satisfação acadêmica (Mdn= 6 vs 5,58), essas

diferenças não foram estatisticamente significativas. significativo ( $p > 0,05$ ). **Conclusões:** A atividade laboral dos estudantes não afetou negativamente o seu comprometimento ou satisfação acadêmica, sugerindo que a integração do trabalho e das responsabilidades acadêmicas poderia beneficiar o desenvolvimento dos estudantes de enfermagem nesta fase inicial da carreira acadêmica.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudantes de Enfermagem; Pesquisa em Educação em Enfermagem; Psicologia Positiva; Psicologia Educacional.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education aims to provide scientific, professional, humanistic, and technical training.<sup>1</sup> For nursing professionals, there is an emphasis on developing competencies essential for the 21st century, including the ability to deliver both autonomous and collaborative care within healthcare teams, as well as quality responses across the lifespan of individuals, families, groups, and communities, at various levels of care and in different contexts. However, universities, whether public or private, face the challenge of reducing student dropout rates to increase the percentage of students graduating.<sup>3</sup>

This is a global phenomenon, and in Latin America, nearly half of the students in the early 21st century dropped out before earning their degrees. Despite implementing preventive systems, dropout rates in some countries still hover around 20%.<sup>4</sup> In Argentina, data from 2017 to 2020 show a rate as high as 38.1%.<sup>5</sup> Early dropout typically occurs during the first two years of undergraduate studies, and the critical period recommended for institutions to implement preventive strategies is during the first year.<sup>6,7</sup>

Dropout is also a multifaceted phenomenon, and individual psychological factors such as stress, depression, and anxiety play a significant role.<sup>8-10</sup> If students lack the necessary psychological resources to cope with the new demands of their academic environment, their performance and healthy adaptation to university life may be affected. In this context, the contributions of Social Cognitive Theory and Positive Psychology are crucial; the former posits that individuals are not merely products of their environmental circumstances, implying that students have a proactive role in their academic adaptation processes.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, Positive Psychology offers an alternative approach to pathologizing and dysfunction-focused perspectives, introducing the construct of academic engagement. Engagement is conceived as a cognitive-affective state related to work that persists over time, not focused exclusively on a specific object or behavior, but characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy while studying, strong persistence, and a strong desire to make an effort in academic pursuits. Dedication is characterized by a high level of significance attributed to studying, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and the challenge associated with one's studies or career. Lastly, absorption involves high levels of concentration, happiness, and the sensation of time passing quickly, with the student becoming fully immersed in their studies.<sup>12, 13</sup>

The significance of engagement in the academic realm is evident, with numerous studies reporting its relationship with other variables such as motivation, learning, academic performance, retention in the system, satisfaction, academic well-being, burnout, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and life satisfaction.<sup>12, 14-17</sup>

Academic or educational satisfaction refers to the enjoyment derived from one's role or experiences as a student.<sup>18</sup> A study conducted on 1,063 first-year students found a statistically significant negative correlation between academic engagement and the intention to drop out early, and a positive correlation with academic satisfaction (with the quality of teaching, relationships with professors,

facilities, etc.).<sup>19</sup> In response to areas of dissatisfaction identified among nursing students, an academic institution implemented a three-year plan addressing issues such as communication, student participation, and the planning of academic and clinical experiences. An increase in academic satisfaction scores was observed as a result. The authors concluded that improving the academic experience is essential for retaining students who are interested in continuing with advanced nursing education.<sup>20</sup> Another study determined that faculty support is crucial for the success of nursing students and for reducing dropout rates at the beginning of the program.<sup>21</sup>

Promoting a university culture that facilitates the transition and integration of nursing students through various support services is a priority.<sup>22</sup> However, the socioeconomic reality in Latin America is often unfavorable, and along with the limited funding for higher education, this creates situations where students face employment needs that must be balanced with the inflexible academic requirements of university curricula, which do not accommodate these needs. This lack of flexibility reduces work/study compatibility, potentially leading to dropout.<sup>4</sup> A study conducted with 1,060 first-year nursing students found an inverse relationship between the number of weekly hours of paid work done by students during the academic term and their academic performance. Students working more than 24 hours per week had the lowest average grades.<sup>23</sup>

There is a need to examine these constructs within the university student population, considering that nursing students may work and study simultaneously. Therefore, employment cannot be overlooked in this context. The objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between academic engagement, academic satisfaction, and employment among first-year nursing students at two private institutions during the year 2024.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study follows a quantitative approach, using a descriptive, analytical, and comparative design, within a prospective longitudinal research framework. The article presents the results obtained from the first data analysis, which implies a cross-sectional design.<sup>24</sup>

### **Universe and Sample**

The universe of this research consisted of 70 students, with the sample comprising 56 first-year nursing students from two private institutions, one located in Entre Ríos and the other in Misiones (Argentina). Initially, the plan was to work with the entire student population; however, due to the absence of some participants during data collection, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used.<sup>24</sup> The inclusion criteria were students enrolled in the first year of the program, over 18 years of age, who provided consent to participate. Students enrolled in the program but starting from the second term were excluded.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The students completed a self-report sociodemographic questionnaire developed by the researchers, which included questions about gender, age, full academic load, employment status, and weekly hours worked if employed.

For the variable Academic Engagement, the Argentine adaptation of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) for students—UWES-S, 2016 version—was used. This instrument consists of 14 items divided into three dimensions: vigor (5 items), dedication (5 items), and absorption (4 items). The original version reported reliability coefficients of 0.73 for vigor, 0.76 for dedication, and 0.70 for absorption. The Argentine adaptation showed the following Cronbach's alpha results: 0.76 for vigor,

0.89 for dedication, 0.74 for absorption, and 0.88 for the overall scale. Each item is answered using a 7-point Likert scale, where 0 indicates “never” and 6 is “always”.<sup>13, 25</sup>

The Academic Satisfaction Scale created by Lent and colleagues was used to evaluate the variable Academic Satisfaction. The scale is unidimensional, consisting of seven items that assess students' satisfaction with experiences related to their roles. The original version of the scale reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. This study used a version adapted to Argentine university students in 2014, which maintained the factorial structure and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. The items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree." The scores from each response are then summed and divided by 7.<sup>18, 25</sup>

### **Period and Strategy for Data Collection**

The study was conducted in June 2024, coinciding with the end of the first term. Students were contacted to participate in the study through digital invitations sent via WhatsApp groups, with a message explaining the research topic.

### **Ethical Aspects**

Informed consent, along with the instruments, was administered via a Google Forms survey. First, students provided their consent to participate in the study, after which they gained access to the instruments. It is important to note that the research and data analysis were coordinated by a researcher who had no direct relationship with the participants, ensuring the confidentiality of the process. Since the invitation was issued and participation was voluntary, there is no specific information available on refusals to participate or withdrawals. If a participant withdrew from the study, their responses were not submitted. This project was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of one of the participating institutions and received approval under resolution No. 57/24.

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 26. An initial descriptive statistical analysis was conducted for all study variables. Data normality was assessed using descriptive measures, graphical representations (histogram, Q-Q plot), and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests. Spearman's Rho test was employed to observe the association between academic engagement and academic satisfaction, and the Mann-Whitney U test to study the relationship between employment status and academic engagement, specifically regarding the dedication dimension. For the vigor and absorption dimensions, the independent samples *t*-test was applied. The association between weekly working hours and both academic engagement and academic satisfaction was examined using Spearman's Rho test. All analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence level, and Cohen's criteria were followed to interpret the magnitude of associations.<sup>26</sup>

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive Analysis**

The sample consisted of 56 first-year nursing students. Of these, 78.6% (n=44) were female, with a mean age of 22.04 years (*SD*=4.84), ranging from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 36 years. Regarding employment, 53.6% (n=30) of the students were working an average of 27.07 hours per week (*SD*=18.71, Median=20). Additionally, 85.7% reported being enrolled in a full academic load for the term.

In terms of academic engagement, the dedication dimension exhibited a left-skewed distribution, with the highest scores (*M*=4.22; *SD*=1.43, Median=4.70), representing 78.33% of the maximum possible

score. This was followed by the vigor ( $M=3.40$ ;  $SD=1.39$ , Median=3.50) and absorption ( $M=3.25$ ;  $SD=1.52$ , Median=3.25) dimensions, which represented 56.67% and 54.17% of the maximum possible score, respectively, both showing a normal distribution. Academic satisfaction displayed a left-skewed distribution, with scores leaning to high satisfaction levels ( $M=5.50$ ;  $SD=1.35$ ; Median=5.92), representing 84.57% of the maximum possible score. No particular aspect of academic satisfaction stood out above the others, as each item showed a median satisfaction score of 6 points (Table 1).

The sample distribution was skewed, with the academic satisfaction instrument showing a  $p$ -value of 0.001 for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, which indicates a non-normal distribution. Conversely, the data for overall academic engagement showed a normal distribution, with a  $p$ -value of 0.200 for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

### Association Analysis

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine the relationship between employment status and academic engagement, specifically regarding the dimension of dedication. This test was selected due to the non-normal distribution of scores in both groups. The Shapiro-Wilk test yielded a  $p$ -value of 0.132 for employed individuals and 0.000 for those who are unemployed. However, the dimensions of vigor and absorption showed a normal distribution in both groups (Shapiro-Wilk for employed individuals: vigor:  $p=0.367$ ; absorption:  $p=0.297$ ; for unemployed individuals: vigor:  $p=0.151$ ; absorption:  $p=0.191$ ), which justified the use of a  $t$ -test for independent samples. Concerning employment status, students who were not employed had higher scores in the dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption; however, these differences were not statistically significant.

To analyze the relationship between employment status and academic satisfaction, the Mann-Whitney U test was used again due to the non-normal distribution of scores in both groups, with a Shapiro-Wilk test yielding a  $p$ -value of 0.000 for employed individuals and 0.013 for those who are unemployed. Employed students exhibited greater academic satisfaction with their chosen fields of study, but these differences were not statistically significant. Moreover, among actively employed students, there was a statistically significant, moderate, and negative correlation between the number of weekly work hours and the absorption dimension, indicating that as the number of weekly work hours increases, the level of absorption in academic engagement decreases ( $\rho = -0.422$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). No association was observed between work hours and the dimensions of vigor, dedication, or academic satisfaction.

Finally, a statistically significant positive and moderate correlation was found between the dimensions of vigor ( $\rho = 0.465$ ), dedication ( $\rho = 0.526$ ), and absorption ( $\rho = 0.418$ ) with academic satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ). These results indicate that higher levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption are associated with higher levels of academic satisfaction among first-year Nursing students.

Table 1. Distribution of nursing students in relation to work activity versus academic commitment (Vigor, Dedication and Absorption) and academic satisfaction (n = 56)

Work activity	Academic Commitment							
	Vigor <sup>1</sup>		Dedication <sup>2</sup>		Absorption <sup>1</sup>		Academic Satisfaction <sup>2</sup>	
	Si	No	Si	No	Si	No	Si	No
N	30	26	30	26	30	26	30	26
M	<b>3,22</b>	<b>3,62</b>	4,13	4,32	<b>3,04</b>	<b>3,50</b>	5,70	5,28
CI95%	2,80 – 3,64	2,96 - 4,27	3,61 – 4,64	3,71 - 4,93	2,58 - 3,50	2,78 - 4,22	5,22 - 6,18	4,71 - 5,84
SD	1,14	1,63	1,37	1,51	1,23	1,78	1,29	1,39
Mdn	3.30	3.70	<b>4</b>	<b>4.80</b>	2.63	3.50	<b>6</b>	<b>5.58</b>
p	0,292		0,536		0,263		0,154	

M=Mean; SD=Standard deviation; 95%CI=Confidence interval; Mdn=Median. 1=Independent samples t test  
2=Mann-Whitney U test

Source: Created by the authors (2024).

## DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the relationship between academic engagement, satisfaction, and employment status among first-year Nursing students. The participants reported positive academic satisfaction with their program (84.57%) and a high level of academic engagement in the dimension of dedication (78.33%), characterized by the significance attributed to their studies, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and the challenges associated with their academic pursuits. In contrast, moderate levels were observed in the dimensions of vigor (56.67%) and absorption (54.17%). This distribution of academic engagement dimensions aligns with both international and national scientific literature, reflecting the consistency of this construct within the general university population<sup>16,19,27,28</sup> and specifically among nursing students.<sup>29-31</sup>

Furthermore, while students who were employed demonstrated slightly lower academic engagement across all dimensions compared to those who were not employed, these differences were not statistically significant. These findings are consistent with research involving 325 first-year and 309 final-year nursing students, where 66.72% (n=423) reported working an average of 15 hours per week. Employment was not negatively associated with academic engagement, even though the reported hours in that study were lower than those observed in the current research.

It is important to note that a statistically significant reduction in the amount of time dedicated to studying was observed; however, when analyzing by academic year, this decrease was statistically significant only among final-year students.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, another study involving 124 nursing students found no association between academic engagement and employment status.<sup>30</sup>

In line with the aforementioned findings, employed students in this research showed greater academic satisfaction with their program; however, these differences were not statistically significant. Overall,

despite the additional time demands and responsibilities associated with balancing work and study, this condition did not negatively impact the academic engagement and satisfaction of first-year Nursing students. This may occur because, as indicated by the results of a systematic review, early work experience for nursing students—particularly in elderly care—enables them to develop clinical and therapeutic skills, improve communication with patients, understand their role within an institution, foster autonomy, and collaborate effectively as team members with colleagues.<sup>33</sup>

Lastly, this study found a statistically significant and positive moderate correlation between the dimensions of academic engagement and academic satisfaction, which aligns with findings reported in the scientific literature.<sup>19,34</sup>

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of a non-probabilistic sampling method limits the generalizability of the results to other populations of nursing students. Second, as this study reports the initial evaluation of the variables within a prospective longitudinal research framework, precautions were taken to anonymize student identities during data analysis. Additionally, only the researcher had access to the database, which raises the possibility that responses may be influenced by social desirability bias. Nonetheless, as described in previous paragraphs, comparisons of the results with national and international literature revealed similarities among studies. Third, although the employment status and the average number of hours worked per week were recorded, the specific nature of the jobs held by the students was not explored in depth. Future research would benefit from investigating how other characteristics of work experience may influence the academic engagement and satisfaction of nursing students.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed high academic satisfaction and significant engagement in the dimension of dedication, as well as moderate levels in the dimensions of vigor and absorption. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between academic engagement and academic satisfaction, highlighting the importance of fostering academic engagement within the university environment. Furthermore, the employment status of the students did not negatively impact their academic engagement or satisfaction, suggesting that integrating work responsibilities with academic duties could benefit the development of nursing students during this early stage of their academic journey.

This research contributes to the exploration of the relationship between academic engagement, academic satisfaction, and employment status among nursing students in their first year, a critical period concerning dropout. Moreover, regarding the challenges that emerge during this stage of adaptation to university life, where students must simultaneously manage work and academic demands, it was observed that this factor did not adversely affect their engagement or academic satisfaction. The findings underscore the importance of developing strategies to promote academic engagement and improve time management from the outset of nursing programs, thereby strengthening the academic and professional development of students.

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### AUTORSHIP:

KMM: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing.

FNG: Data Curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing.



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