

"I am not Einstein, I just work hard"

How high achieving students and teachers define academic success

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Research Questions

How do students and teachers define an ideal secondary school student? Does this differ depending on the ethnicity of the student and/or teacher?

Exploring the attributes of academically successful students and their teachers

583 Year 12/13 students

480 female and 103 male

Māori = 90
Pākehā = 313
Asian = 128
Pasifika 33
Other ethnicities = 19

274 teachers

169 female and 105 male

Māori = 43
Pākehā = 212
Other ethnicities = 19

73 secondary schools

- 20 high decile
- 34 mid-decile
- 19 low decile

89 secondary schools

- 24 high decile
- 44 mid-decile
- 20 low decile
- One without a decile rating

Selected Literature

- Horsley's (2009) study on NZ Scholarship students. 'Teacher' was the greatest overall influence on student success, ahead of 'ability'.
- Griffin & Allen's (2006) study of high achieving Black students found students attributed success to their teachers.
- Macfarlane, Webber, Cookson-Cox, & McRae, (2014) identified important attributes for high achieving Māori students included self-motivation, resilience, positive student-teacher relationships.

An Academically Successful Student

Students	Teachers
Hard work & Effort (86.8%)	Self-motivation (88%)
Self-motivation (63.1%)	Hard work & Effort (69.2%)
Organisation & time management (37.4%)	Organisation & time management (49.3%)
A positive attitude (23.3%)	Self-belief & Self-confidence (32.5%)
Engagement with school & class activities (20.2%)	Supportive home background (27.4%)
Questioning teachers and asking for help (18.2%)	Literacy & numeracy skills (27.5%)
A study-life balance (16.6%)	Engagement with school & class activities (25.2%)
Supporting & helping other students to achieve (10.5%)	

Statistically significant differences between Māori and Pākehā teachers



Organisation & time management

Statistically significant differences by teacher ethnicity

Organisation and time management skills – Pākehā teachers reported more frequently than Māori teachers that organisation and time management skills were characteristic of an academically successful student.

Z-test

Pākehā and Māori ($Z = 2.871, p = 0.0041$)

Organisation & time management

“They know their timetable. They have diaries...They keep all their paperwork neatly where they can access it; they have good systems”

[T-105, Female, Pākehā, Decile 3].

Statistically significant differences by student ethnicity



Hard work & effort

Self-motivation

Organisation & time management

Supporting & helping other students to achieve

Statistically significant differences by student ethnicity



Hard work and effort –

Māori and Asian students reported more frequently than Pākehā and Pasifika students that ‘hard work and effort’ was important for academic success.

Z-tests

Māori and Pākehā ($Z = 4.548, p < .001$),

Maori and Pasifika ($Z = 5.605, p < .001$),

Asian and Pākehā ($Z = 3.391, p < .001$)

Asian and Pasifika students ($Z = 4.311, p < .001$)

Hard work and effort

“I believe good grades result from partly intelligence but mostly hard work and that is what I truly did. I am not Einstein, I just work hard” [S-571, Female, Asian, Decile 10].

“They study hard all year ‘round rather than leaving it to the weeks before exams” [S-260, Female, Māori, Decile 5].

Statistically significant differences by student ethnicity



Self-motivation– Pākehā students reported more frequently than Asian students that self-motivation was important for academic success.

Z tests

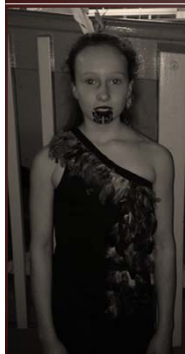
Pākehā and Asian ($Z = 2.891, p = 0.005$)

Self-motivation

"The drive to want to do better in life and not to have to live in poverty" [S-361, Female, Māori, Decile 4].

"...acts like they're in university...Because they want to do well, and they want to receive high grades to give themselves the best possible chance for their future, they will push themselves" [S-361, Female, Pākehā, Decile 10].

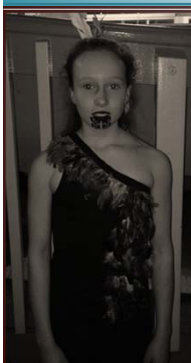
Statistically significant differences by student ethnicity



Organisation & time management – Asian students reported more frequently than Pākehā students that organisation & time management was characteristic of an academically successful student

Z tests
Asian and Pākehā ($Z = 2.891$, $p = 0.0038$)

Statistically significant differences by student ethnicity



Supports and helps other students to achieve– Māori students reported more frequently than Pākehā students that 'supporting and helping others to achieve' was a characteristics of an academically successful student

Z tests
Māori and Pākehā ($Z = 2.02$, $p = 0.0434$)

Supports and helps other students to achieve

"Willing to help students around them who are struggling" [S-447, Female Māori, Decile 6].

A successful student is not one to judge others on their achievements, but encourages them to push themselves just that little bit more to achieve with a Merit or Excellence" [S-468, Female, Māori, Decile 3].

Supportive home background

"The home/family life of a student has the greatest effect on a student's success. If they are not brought up to value education or school then the vast majority won't do well ... It is very hard to change a student's mind about their education when all their life their family has been telling them school is a waste of time and not important. We might be able to change one or two students' outlooks, but not the majority"

[T-016, Male, Pākehā, Decile 3].

Statistically significant differences between students & teachers

More frequently reported by teachers	More frequently reported by students
Questioning teachers & asking for help ($Z = 3.305$, $p = <.009$)	Hard work & effort ($Z = 5.605$, $p = <.001$)
Self-motivation ($Z = 2.787$, $p = 0.0053$)	A study-life balance ($Z = 5.44$, $p = <.001$)
Organisation & time management ($Z = 3.295$, $p = 0.001$)	A positive attitude ($Z = 2.821$, $p = 0.0048$)
Self belief & self-confidence ($Z = 5.44$, $p = <.001$)	–
Supportive home background ($Z = 9.476$, $p = <.001$)	–

Some conclusions

- It appeared that students in this study attributed academic success to personal characteristics rather than to other people.
- Teachers appeared to place responsibility for academic success with the student or their family.
- There appeared to be more similarities than differences between the student ethnic groups