

# **Meanings of School Success for the Teenager Students in Vocational Schools, Sports Profile**

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

teenager, school success, sports success, vocational high school, sports profile

Success represents a general human value attribute that acquires meanings and forms depending on the field of knowledge to which we refer. In formative-educational activities, it takes the form of school success. The complexity of this concept is widely described in specialized literature, but our current interests are centered on the segment of vocational schools, sports profile, following the period of adolescence. "What meanings does school success have for student-athletes, teenagers?", is the question by which we try to outline the nuances of school success, particularly for this category of students. We start from the premise that the level of students' commitment, and their involvement in school activities largely determines success. Based on this commitment, the targeted students, from the vocational schools with a sports profile, enroll on the path of achieving school success in terms of completing their high school studies, obtaining the final exam diploma, and passing the professional skills certification exam.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Jugendlicher, Schulerfolg, sportlicher Erfolg, berufliches Gymnasium, Sportprofil

Erfolg stellt ein allgemeines menschliches Wertmerkmal dar, das je nach Wissensgebiet, auf das wir uns beziehen, Bedeutungen und Formen annimmt. Im fortbildungs-pädagogischen Bereich zeigt es sich in Form von Schulerfolgen. Die Komplexität dieses Konzepts wird in der Fachliteratur ausführlich beschrieben, unser aktuelles Interesse konzentriert sich jedoch auf den Bereich der Berufungsschulen, mit sportlichem Profil, und studiert die Zeit der Adoleszenz. „Welche Bedeutung hat schulischer Erfolg für die Sportler, die noch Schüler sind?“ ist die Frage, mit der wir versuchen, die Nuancen des schulischen Erfolgs speziell für diese Schülerkategorie zu skizzieren. Wir gehen davon aus, dass der Grad des Engagements der Schüler und ihre Beteiligung an schulischen Aktivitäten maßgeblich den Erfolg bestimmen. Auf der Grundlage dieses Engagements beschreiben die gezielten Schüler, aus Berufungsschulen mit sportlichem Profil den Weg zum schulischen Erfolg, im Hinblick auf den Abschluss des Abiturstudiums, den Erwerb des Abiturzeugnisses und das Bestehen der Berufsqualifizierungsprüfung.

## 1. Introduction

Vocational high schools allow students access to an educational system that develop specific skills based on their vocation. Derived from the Latin word *vocare*, the term vocation denotes *the call* to a certain field of knowledge.

In vocational high schools, sports profile, students can manifest their calling towards the field of movement activities, offering them a favorable environment for the externalization of their interests and skills.

The specialized theoretical and practical sports training during the four years of vocational high school guides the students towards studying different sports branches practiced, according to the specialization. This specialized school training is completed by taking a certification exam of professional skills, at the end of high school studies,

teenagers, graduating students. We can appreciate the fact that based on the optimal functioning of two main elements, vocation and a favorable instructional-educational school environment, the students involved can acquire a professional qualification, that of sports instructor, level 4. We reflect on the value meanings that the target students attach to this fact as part of their school success.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

Adolescence is "the period of gradual maturation of the person from a biological, psychological, and social point of view" (Bocoş et al., 2021, p. 53). Characterized by deep morphological, functional, and psychological changes, this age stage is considered by specialists to be extremely difficult, challenging in the context of the educational path. At the same time, openness to change, acceptance of new challenges,



and courageous tendencies to experiment and overcome one's own limits become opportunities for the teenage student's development. To all this, we specifically add the motor experiences, sports, for sports students from vocational schools, sports profile.

Being characterized as a period of new attempts, many specialists in the field of psychology recall the so-called adaptive mechanisms developed by teenager students in this sense, well outlined both for their own transformations and for the challenges of social transformations. The level of functioning of these mechanisms has an impact on the commitment shown by them in school situations, conditioning the achievement of success on the educational path (Dincă, 2004). School success acquires particularities nuanced by the specifics of vocational high schools, sports profile, to which we refer. This complex concept harmonizes, in this sense, the theoretical school successes as well as the practical one, sports school successes.

If school success can be understood as "obtaining a favorable result and a superior performance in the instructive-educational activity" (Bocoş et al., 2021, p. 1893), then sports success can be understood from the perspective of the level of sports performance at which

the student is placed, the concrete results obtained in competitions, certain standards, and progress from one sports category of practitioners to another, from beginners to high-performance athletes. The level of commitment to school and sports activities is one of the many factors underlying school and sports success, and success in general.

The implications of the student's level of active commitment in situations specific to school learning or motor learning can be greatly influenced by external factors, such as family and teachers, even if the nature of this commitment has deep internal, motivational valences. Thus, the level of engagement of the adolescent student in his own process of becoming through school learning becomes an anticipatory element of success or failure in the instructive-educational context (Caranfil & Robu, 2017). Having described the vocational educational context, where the call to a certain field of knowledge determines optimally motivated involvement in school activities, we recall that most of the high school students who abandoned their studies come from the technological stream and a few from the theoretical and vocational streams (Report State of Pre-University Education, 2022-2023).

Table 1. Dropout rate in high school education. Source: Data calculated based on INS information, 2015-2023

Vocational high school	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
%	1,6	1,4	1,5	1,2	0,8	0,8	0,4	0,9

Note: When calculating the indicator, students enrolled in the "Second Chance" Program were not taken into account (retrieved from Report State of Pre-University Education, 2022-2023, p. 35).

In the specialized sports literature, there are studies and research aimed at various aspects of the vocational school segment, most of them centered on the needs of sports students as the main pioneers in the concerns of school education.

Such a study was initiated by Ardelean et al., 2021, targeting the school population from the Suceava Sports Program High School, students from the 9th and 12th grades, in the period September 2015-August 2019. The aim was to highlight two significant aspects of the subjects included, the determination of the factors that influence the numerical values of the students during a four-year cycle of high school with a sports profile, and the identification of the professional orientation options of future graduates. The conclusions highlight the factors that lead to changes in the number of students during a school year, with an emphasis on overly permissive

legislation and the tendency expressed by these students to follow a higher education institution. Statistically expressed data, due to the research presented, highlights the considerable participation of students in the professional skills certification exam, which expresses the search for school success in this educational-school segment as well.

Table 2. Professional Qualification Exam, Sport Program High School Suceava (retrieved from Ardelean et. al., 2021, p. 8)

Professional qualification exam	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Students enrolled/ students promoted	53/53	88/71	59/57	71/69

Academic success in schools with a sports profile is influenced by the factors of the specialized disciplines, in this case by the practical and theoretical sports disciplines. This success is determined by the quality of training, the passing rate of the final exam, sports performance, integration in the work field, or university academic structures (Ardelean et al., 2021).

Statistics at the national level show that at the 2023 baccalaureate exam, eight out of ten students from vocational high schools passed this exam (Report State of Pre-University Education, 2022–2023). However, in this context, we must consider the multiple challenges of such school units determined by external socio-economic factors and negative causal biases (Clipa & Honciuc, 2020), as for example, school academic results are negatively influenced by students' participation in training or competitive sports activities.

Thus, through our study undertaken and presented in this article, we want to highlight the meanings of school success from the perspective of sport students as favorable support for the efficiency and usefulness of the high school sports profile.

The complex particularities of school and sports commitment are widely presented in the specialized literature. Three dimensions of commitment are mentioned (Veiga, 2016), which we present below.

- Cognitive dimension: with reference to the strategies used by the adolescent student to make learning more efficient, with the aim of school success;
- The affective dimension: with references to emotional behavior, manifested in relation to school activities;
- Behavioral dimension: with references to positive behaviors centered on the path of school success.

Authors such as York et al. (2015) present explanations such as the fact that academic success is comprised of academic achievement, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies, persistence, and retention. School results refer to a result that includes the student's work quantified by grades, qualifications, or direct results in the form of learning products. Persistence and maintenance are considered measures of school progress (York et al., 2015), determination and perseverance to achieve the goals pursued, which implies a strong school commitment.

Even if the meanings presented to the concept of school success are generally accepted, it still acquires particular aspects due to the particularities of vocational schools, sports profile. Thus, in order to evoke such particular aspects, we started a study focused on highlighting the meanings of school success from the perspective of athletic students, teenagers, from the Sports Program High School Bistrița.

### 3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to highlight the possible particular nuances of school success from the perspective of students from vocational high schools, sports profile, taking into account the specifics of these schools and the students' sports specialization.

### 4. Research methodology

We included subjects, 160 students, from the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, during the school years 2020–2021, 2021–2022, 2022–2023, from Sport Program High School Bistrița. Participation was random. Participating students were informed in advance about how to select the answers, they were informed about the data protection rules and they were asked to give their consent to participate as subjects in the study. In order to extract qualitative data, we designed a form composed of 10 items faithful to the specific theme of the study, "School success in the view of sports students from vocational high schools, sports profile". We harmoniously included short-answer and multiple-choice items.

- Data collection methods;
  - ✓ Questionnaire-based survey method.
- Statistical-mathematical methods of organization, processing, and graphic presentation;
  - ✓ Tools used: EXCEL, Word.

### 5. Results and discussion

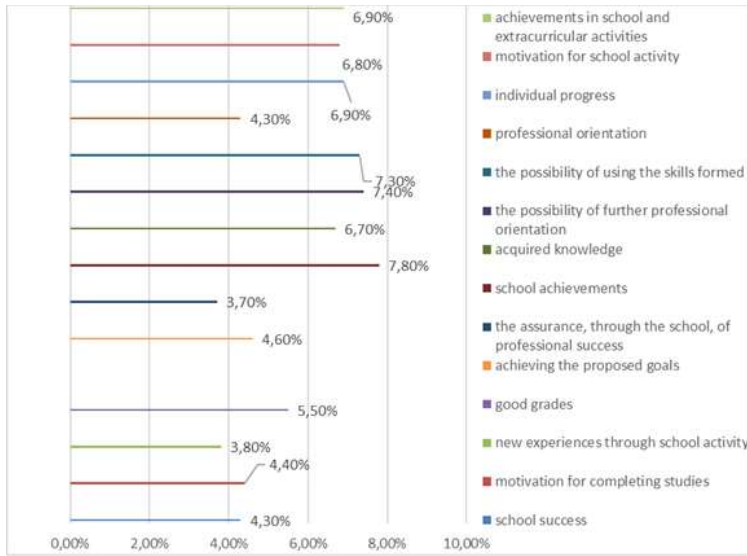
We present below the recorded results for each item of the questionnaire.

- Item 1 of the questionnaire: What do you mean by school success?

The answers given by the subjects are varied, registering individual nuances according to personal meanings. Assimilation of knowledge, individual progress, acquired competencies, and new experiences gained through school activity are just a few examples of responses with high frequency recorded according

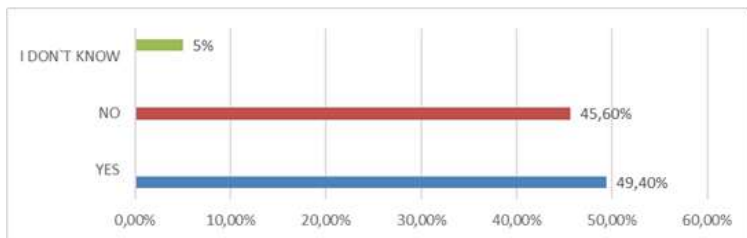
to the preferences of the surveyed subjects to highlight the meanings of school success.

Figure 1. The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on Item 1 of the questionnaire



- Item 2 of the questionnaire: Do you attribute academic success to the student who gets high grades?

Figure 2. The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 2 of the questionnaire

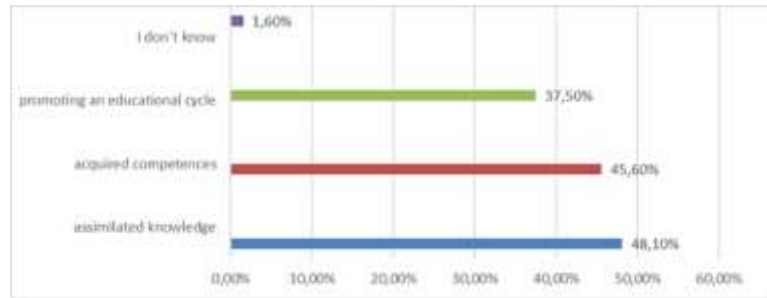


Following the analysis of the data obtained and presented in the figure above, approximately equal values can be observed between the two categories of answers. In this context, we can highlight the importance that the surveyed students gave to grades, qualifications, as elements of recognition of school performance. The grades, the qualifications, and the points obtained still represent, for the surveyed students, a form of value recognition, a level of the work done, of the intellectual and/or physical effort. The percentage value recorded according to the obtained data, 49.40%, reinforces the above statements.

- Item 3 of the questionnaire: You associate school success with:

- ✓ Promotion of an educational cycle;
- ✓ Competences obtained;
- ✓ The assimilated knowledge;
- ✓ I don't know.

Figure 3. The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 3 of the questionnaire

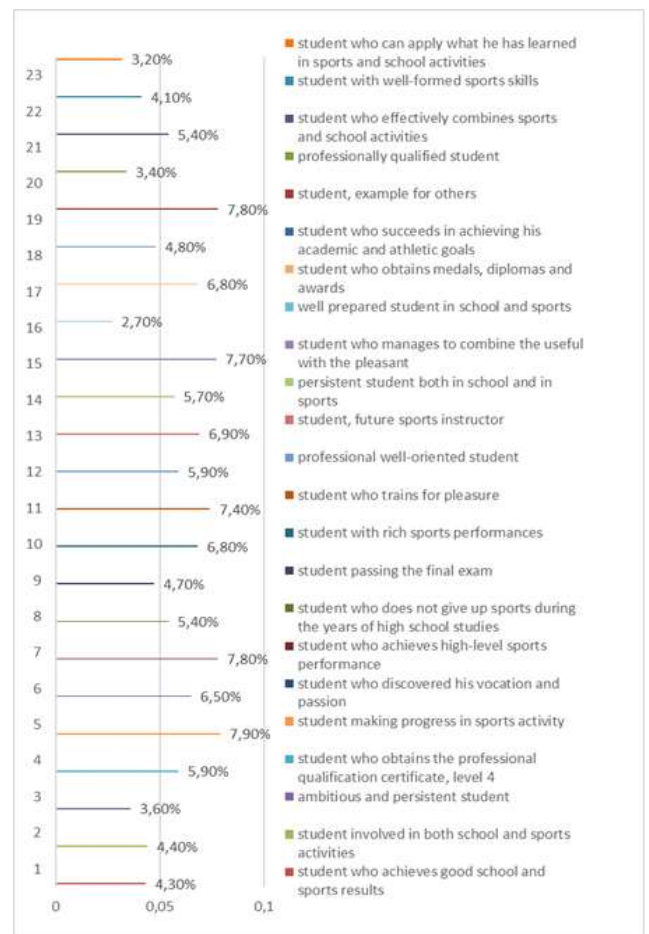


As can be seen from the figure above, a significant percentage of students from the Bistrita Sports Program High School (48.10 %) appreciate the knowledge assimilated in school activities as elements of personal school success. The skills obtained are percentage-wise on the second value scale, 45.60. Thus, we can conclude that the concept of competence and its implications are still confusing for some students, who focus on assimilated knowledge.

We specify that, for this item, the student respondents also had the opportunity to choose several answer options.

- Item 4 of the questionnaire: What does a successful sports student mean?

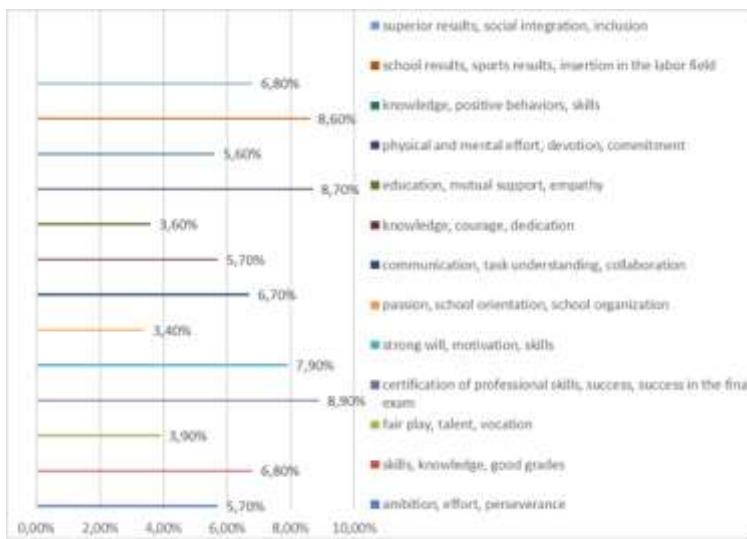
Figure 4. The opinion of the students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 4 of the questionnaire



The successful sports student acquires different, multiple nuances, as observed through the diversity of the answers provided by the participating students. The wide range of opinions of the teenager sports students from Sports Program High School Bistrița indicates a harmonious combination between sports and school activities, emphasizing the level of success in the two segments of activity.

- Item 5 of the questionnaire: What are the defining elements of school success, from the perspective of student-athletes in vocational high schools? (3 items)

Figure 5. The opinion of the students from the Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 5 of the questionnaire

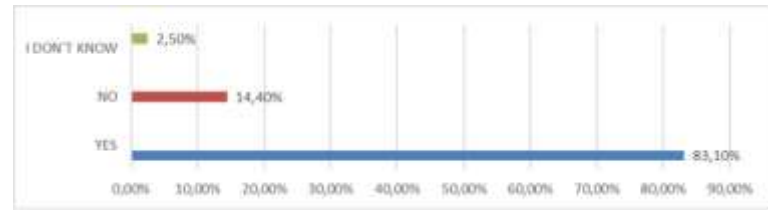


As can be seen from the answers recorded to item 5 of the questionnaire, the teenager students, athletes, enrolled in vocational high schools, define school success according to the physical and mental effort, the will, the dedication to involvement and the achievement of the proposed goal, the theoretical and practical sports knowledge acquired, the certification of the professional qualification, ambition, and general and specific skills. School and sports success is also interpreted by the surveyed students from the perspective of motivational persistence and orientation towards clearly defined tasks.

- Item 6 of the questionnaire: Is sports success part of general school success?

As we present in the figure above, the athletic students, teenagers, from Sports Program High School Bistrița consider, in a predominant percentage of 83.10%, the fact that sports success complements general school success. Thus, we can highlight the value meanings attributed to sports success in the context of general school activities.

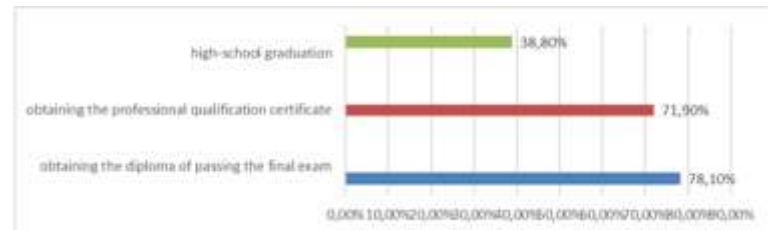
Figure No. 6: The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 6 of the questionnaire



- Item 7 of the questionnaire: From the perspective of sports students from vocational high schools, sports profile, school success can be associated with:

- ✓ Obtaining the final exam diploma;
- ✓ Obtaining the professional qualification certificate;
- ✓ High school graduation.

Figure 7. The opinion of students from High School with Sports Program Bistrița on item 7 of the questionnaire

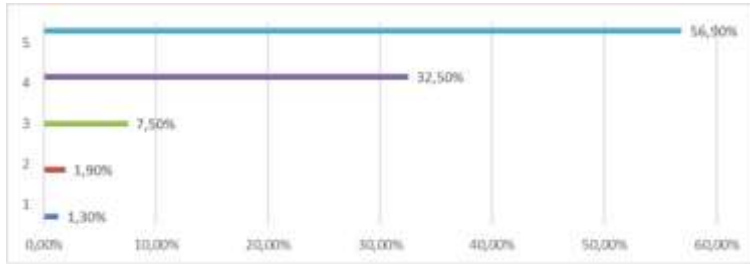


In this item, we propose to the subjects a combination of three types of answers that can be chosen to express their opinion regarding the significance of school success from the perspective of the student athlete. Thus, through the quantitative analysis of the recorded data, we observe that the first option, obtaining the final exam diploma, registers the highest percentage, 78.10. However, the second option, obtaining the professional qualification certificate, is close in percentage to the first option, 71.90%. We conclude that, for the students participating in the questionnaires, the subjects of this study, these two options offered as answers are important elements of school success.

We specify, in the context described by the interpretation of the data obtained through the answers to item 7, that students graduating from vocational high schools, sports profile, have the opportunity to register and participate in the professional skills certification exam. After passing this exam, students will obtain a qualification as a sports instructor, level 4, according to their specialization. Thus, the fact that the surveyed subjects opted for answer option 2 in such a large number suggests their desire to complete their high school studies, in a successful manner and from this perspective.

- Item 8 of the questionnaire: To what extent do you value the professional qualification, sports instructor, level 4, part of school success?

Figure No. 8: The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 8 of the questionnaire

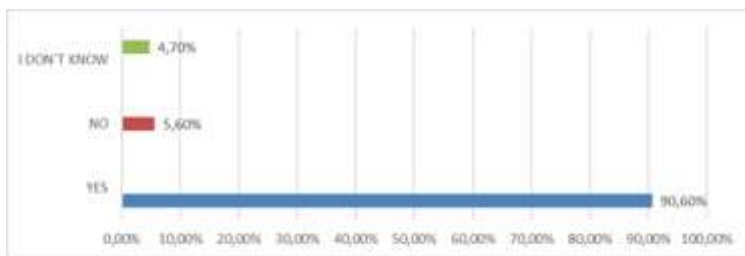


In the sense of continuing the ongoing investigation, and obtaining as eloquent data as possible, we included in the content of the questionnaire the question regarding the meanings of professional qualifications, as an element of school success.

The percentage of 56.90 indicates that most students opted for the highest value, 5, according to the proposed scale. Thus, the responsibility of a quality instructional-educational process is all the greater, as the students recognize this professional qualification, sports instructor, as personal school success.

- Item 9 of the questionnaire: Do you consider that all the sports, theoretical, and practical skills acquired during high school studies complete your academic success?

Figure 9. The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 9 of the questionnaire



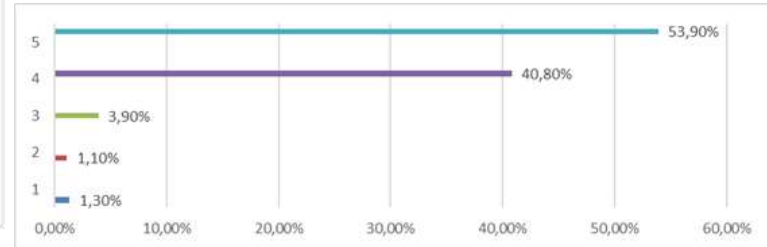
Of the surveyed students, the majority, 90.60%, affirm, by selecting the answer YES, that all skills, theoretical and practical, are part of general school success.

- Item 10 of the questionnaires: Is sports success (sports results alongside passing the qualification certification exam) a personal fulfillment?

According to the figure presented above, we notice that 53.90% of the surveyed subjects chose the numerical value 5, which represents the variant *To a very large extent*. Others, in the percent of 40.80,

considered satisfactory for their personal opinion, the numerical value 4 from the proposed scale. We conclude that students value sports success as an important factor in personal fulfillment.

Figure No. 10: The opinion of students from Sports Program High School Bistrița on item 10 of the questionnaire



## 6. Conclusions

School success is a common concern of the pawns directly involved in the instructive-educational process, student-teacher. Even if this concept of school success is described with clarity and precision in the specialized literature, nuanced meanings may appear from the perspective of some particularities specific to the school context. Through the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results recorded through this extensive survey process, we highlighted those particular nuances of school success, as highlighted by the opinions expressed by the students from Sports Program High School Bistrița. Thus, they appreciate sports success as part of school success, including as content elements the completion of high school studies with a final exam diploma and with a professional qualification certificate, according to the specialization. In this context, the value of the student's involvement in the preparation of the certification exam for the graduates, sports profile, increases. Passing this exam represents a strong element of personal fulfillment for students. Sports success, completed by the success of obtaining the qualification, is, along with the success of passing the final exam, an important factor in the success of teenage students in vocational high schools, sports profile.

We emphasize that this study addresses exclusively pre-university education units, sports profile. Among the limits of the study, we mention the relatively small sample of subjects, including only students from Bistrița Sports Program High School. At the same time, we take into account the possible subjectivity or superficiality of some students in giving answers, without awareness of objective involvement. Although at the beginning of the questionnaire process we provided concrete explanations on how to choose the answers, for each

item separately, we explained terms introduced in the questionnaire items that were considered unknown or complex, we highlight all these possible limits of the presented study.

However, we specify that the data obtained and the conclusions drawn can represent solid support for its extension to other school units with a sports profile, in a joint attempt to generalize at the national level the meanings of school success for sport students. In this way, we would clearly highlight the place and role of vocational high schools, sports profile, in the Romanian education system.

#### Authors note:

**Toderic Adriana** is currently a doctoral student at the Doctoral School “Education, Reflection, Development” (domain: Sciences of Education), Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her professional and research interests are: humane education, school management, interdisciplinary curriculum development, sport science. She is also interested in finding the most efficient teaching practices that may be successfully used in the educational process.

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