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Systematic Literature Review on Academic Satisfaction

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Abstract

Academic satisfaction is a key indicator of higher education quality, reflecting students' overall evaluation of their academic experiences. This systematic review synthesizes research from 2014 to 2025, exploring definitions, measurement tools, determinants, and outcomes of academic satisfaction globally. Grounded in Expectation-Disconfirmation, Social Cognitive, and Self-Determination theories, it highlights the multidimensional nature of satisfaction influenced by individual, institutional, and socio-cultural factors. Academic satisfaction strongly correlates with academic performance, well-being, retention, and career readiness. Emerging research focuses on digital learning, cross-cultural differences, and academic emotions. The review provides evidence-based recommendations for enhancing teaching, curriculum, support services, and institutional policies to improve student satisfaction and educational effectiveness.

Keywords

Academic satisfaction, higher education, systematic literature review.

1. Introduction

Academic satisfaction is a key indicator of quality and effectiveness in higher education, reflecting students' cognitive, emotional, and motivational evaluations of their academic experience[1]. As higher education shifts toward learner-centered approaches, academic satisfaction plays a central role in driving pedagogical innovation, curriculum design, and institutional accountability[2].

Global trends, including rapid expansion and massification have created diverse student populations with complex expectations, requiring institutions to adopt more nuanced understandings of satisfaction[3]. Technological advancements have further reshaped the academic landscape. Technological advances, particularly the rise of online, hybrid, and blended learning, have introduced new factors affecting academic satisfaction, such as platform usability, accessibility, instructor responsiveness, and peer interaction[4].

Despite increasing research on academic satisfaction, there is no consensus on its definition, measurement, or theoretical foundation[1]. Studies use diverse constructs and instruments, often relying on cross-sectional designs. Additionally, few reviews have integrated findings across disciplines or cultures, hindering the creation of a unified framework to inform institutional policies and practices.

In response to these gaps, this systematic review aims to synthesize recent research on academic satisfaction in higher education. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Clarify the conceptual definitions and theoretical models of academic satisfaction;
2. Evaluate the measurement tools used in empirical studies;
3. Identify key individual, institutional, and social determinants of satisfaction;
4. Examine the outcomes of academic satisfaction on academic and personal development;

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5. Provide recommendations for future research and educational practice.

Drawing on studies published between 2014 and 2025, this review contributes to a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of academic satisfaction within a global and rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

2. Conceptual Definitions and Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. Defining Academic Satisfaction

Academic satisfaction refers to students' overall evaluation of their academic experience, including instruction, learning outcomes, and institutional support[5]. It is a subjective evaluation shaped by students' expectations, experiences, and the perceived value of their education[6]. Academic satisfaction reflects both cognitive judgments—such as whether a course met learning objectives—and affective reactions—such as enjoyment, boredom, or frustration related to academic activities[5].

While some researchers conceptualize academic satisfaction as a unidimensional construct [7], others adopt a multidimensional perspective. The latter includes satisfaction with instruction quality, course content, learning environment, faculty interaction, institutional support services, and perceived academic growth [8].

2.2. Theoretical Foundations.

Key theories explaining academic satisfaction include:

2.2.1. Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT)

Originating in consumer behavior research, Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory [9] posits that satisfaction arises when performance meets or exceeds expectations, widely applied but criticized for overlooking internal psychological states.

2.2.2. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory [10] emphasizes academic self-efficacy—students' belief in their own capability—as central to satisfaction, resulting from the interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors.

2.2.3. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory [11]. emphasizes the satisfaction that arises from fulfilling autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs; intrinsic motivation enhances satisfaction in supportive environments.

3. Methodology

To ensure transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor, this systematic review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines [12]. The review process followed four key stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Additionally, the AXIS (Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies) checklist was used to assess the quality of the included studies.

3.1. Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was carried out across three major electronic databases: Web of Science, Proquest, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center). The search targeted publications from January 2014 to April 2025, with an emphasis on capturing recent research that reflects current developments in academic satisfaction. A compilation of the most relevant articles retrieved—based on keyword alignment and inclusion criteria—is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1: Search Results in Databases Using the Keywords

Database	Number of Studies	Search terms
Web of Science	676	"academic satisfaction" OR "student satisfaction" AND "higher education" OR "university" OR "college students" AND "factors" OR "predictors" OR "outcomes" OR "engagement" OR "self-efficacy" OR "learning environment".
Proquest	314	
ERIC	270	

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

While search terms and Boolean operators were tailored to each database, they generally followed a standardized combination of keywords related to academic satisfaction and its determinants. To maintain the relevance and quality of the synthesized studies, the following criteria were applied as Table 2.

Table 2: The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document type	peer-reviewed empirical articles; studies focused on undergraduate or postgraduate academic satisfaction; quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method studies; studies with full-text availability.	conference abstracts, commentaries, book chapters; studies on general life satisfaction not linked to academic contexts; studies focusing solely on faculty or institutional satisfaction; duplicate publications or retracted articles.
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	studies published between 2014 and 2025	< 2014

3.3. Screening and Selection Process

The initial search yielded 1,260 records according to the above-mentioned criteria. Using Zotero, 370 duplicates were removed. The remaining 890 articles were subjected to title and abstract screening by two independent reviewers. After this stage, 520 records were excluded for irrelevance. The remaining 370 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 350 studies were excluded due to methodological weaknesses, lack of outcome data, or failure to focus on academic satisfaction. Finally, 30 articles met all criteria and were included in this

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systematic review. The process is summarized below in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram as Figure 1.

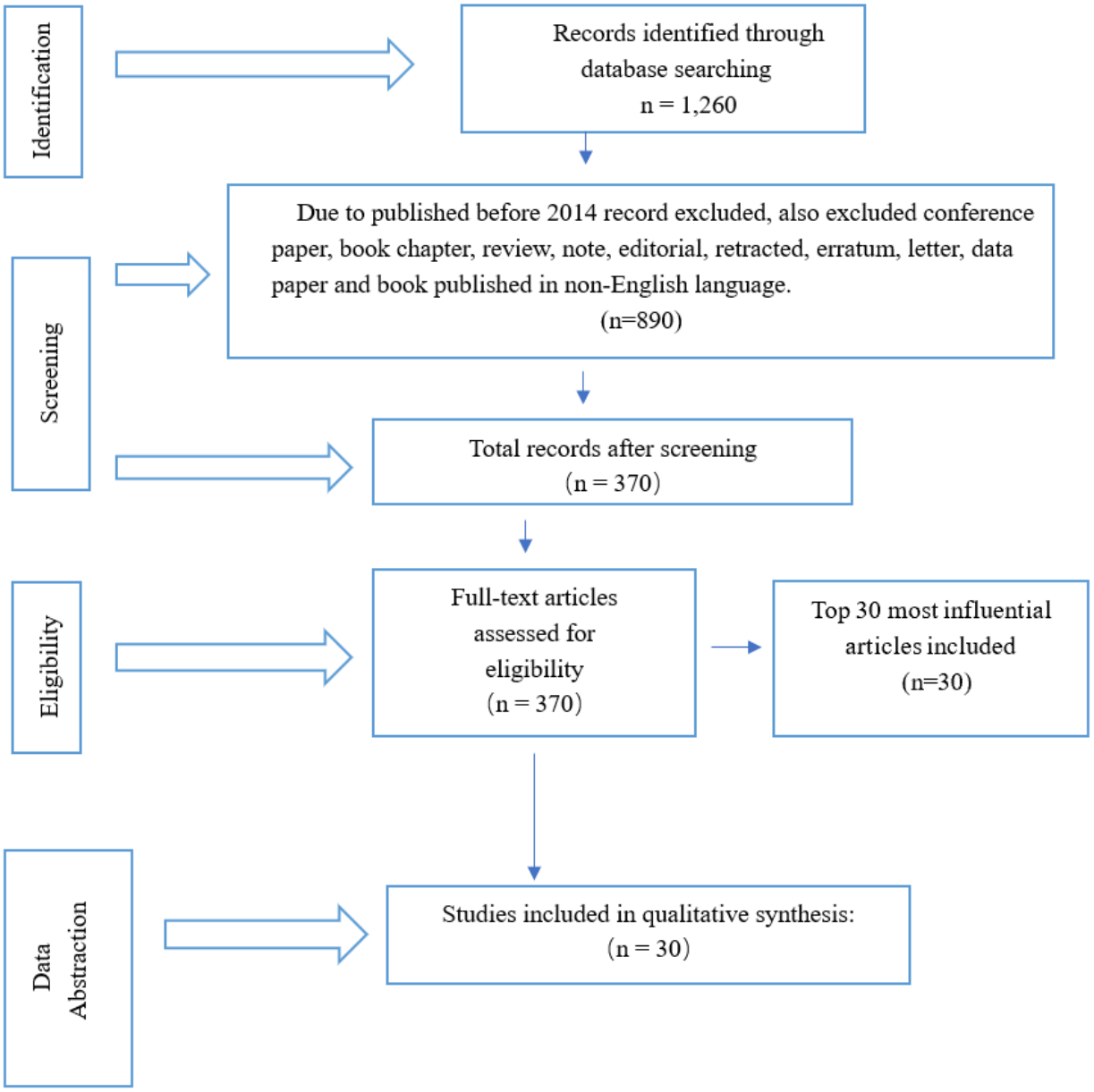

Figure 1: Flow Diagram of literature screening process
(Source:(Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022))

3.4. Quality Assessment

The AXIS tool [13]. was used to assess the quality of all included cross-sectional studies, which accounted for over 85% of the selected articles. This 20-item checklist evaluates: clarity of research aims and design; appropriateness of methodology; sampling techniques and justification; description of target population; outcome measures and statistical methods; response rates and potential for bias; ethics and funding transparency; each study was assessed independently by two reviewers, with disagreements resolved through discussion or third-party arbitration.

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Table 3: Key Findings from AXIS Assessment

Level of the Studies	NO.
High-quality studies (Score ≥ 17)	16
Moderate quality (Score 14–16)	11
Low-quality studies (Score ≤ 13)	3

4. Measurement Instruments of Academic Satisfaction

Reliable and valid measurement is essential for studying academic satisfaction. As a subjective, multidimensional construct, it requires tools that are both psychometrically robust and adaptable to context. This section reviews the most widely used and cited instruments, highlighting their key features and applicability.

4.1. College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSSQ)

One of the earliest tools for measuring academic satisfaction is the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSSQ) developed by [14]. The CSSQ includes subscales assessing academic advising, course content, faculty interaction, and institutional services using Likert scales. Although somewhat dated, it remains foundational in North American research. Its limitations include outdated language, limited sensitivity to modern learning modes (e.g., online/hybrid), reduced cross-cultural adaptability, and a greater focus on service quality than on student agency or affective outcomes.

4.2. Academic Satisfaction Scale (ASS)

A more recent and comprehensive tool is the Academic Satisfaction Scale developed by [6]. This instrument is based on Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory and Self-Determination Theory, measuring satisfaction across academic performance, curriculum relevance, institutional support, and peer interaction. It uniquely integrates both external factors and internal factors. Validated with undergraduate and graduate students, the Academic Satisfaction Scale shows high internal consistency and reliable psychometric properties across Western and non-Western educational contexts.

4.3. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is widely used across the United States and Canada to assess students' perceptions of academic engagement and satisfaction [6]. While NSSE does not directly measure academic satisfaction as a separate construct, it includes items related to learning satisfaction, such as satisfaction with courses, faculty interaction, and perceived academic growth.

4.4. Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ)

Originally developed in Australia, the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ) focuses on students' satisfaction with individual courses [15]. The SCEQ measures five scales—teaching quality, clear goals, workload, assessment, and skills development. It's widely used for course-level evaluations, offering targeted feedback but lacks coverage of broader institutional or student life satisfaction.

4.5. Online and Context-Specific Instruments

Tools such as the Online Learning Satisfaction Scale [2]. and the E-Learning Satisfaction Inventory [16]. focus on aspects such as platform usability, content accessibility, and instructor presence in virtual environments.

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4.6. Cultural Adaptation and Translation of Tools

With growing interest in cross-national comparisons, researchers have adapted and validated instruments like the CSSQ and NSSE for diverse cultures, using methods such as back-translation, expert reviews, pilot testing, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis to ensure reliability and construct validity [17].

5. Determinants of Academic Satisfaction

5.1. Individual-Level Determinants

With growing interest in cross-national comparisons, researchers have adapted and validated Academic self-efficacy—students' beliefs in their academic abilities is a strong and consistent predictor of academic satisfaction [18,19,20]. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to perceive academic challenges as manageable, actively engage in learning tasks, and derive satisfaction from their academic pursuits.

Personality traits like conscientiousness and emotional stability influence academic satisfaction[21]. Conscientious students are organized and persistent, leading to more positive experiences, while emotionally stable students experience less anxiety, enhancing satisfaction with academic demands[22].

Self-determined motivation and self-regulation strategies—like time management and goal-setting—are key predictors of academic satisfaction[11,23]. Intrinsically motivated students tend to feel more fulfilled and report higher satisfaction [24]. Using proactive learning strategies enhances perceived competence and autonomy, both essential for satisfaction [24].

Demographic factors also influence academic satisfaction [6]. Gender effects are mixed: females may be more satisfied with interpersonal aspects, while males may prefer academic autonomy or career relevance [25].

5.2. Institutional-Level Determinants

With growing interest in cross-national comparisons, researchers have adapted and validated Academic self-efficacy—students' beliefs in their academic abilities is a strong and consistent predictor of academic satisfaction [8,19,20]. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to perceive academic challenges as manageable, actively engage in learning tasks, and derive satisfaction from their academic pursuits.

Quality of teaching is a key institutional determinant of academic satisfaction [26]. Clear instruction, accessible faculty, and perceived teaching competence strongly influence satisfaction, while well-structured courses with clear objectives and relevant content also boost it [27,2].

Effective academic advising and accessible support services strongly enhance academic satisfaction [28]. When students receive counseling, tutoring, or career guidance, they develop a sense of belonging and trust in their institution [29].

The physical and digital learning environments and online platforms [30]. are crucial to academic satisfaction. Students who find these environments modern, accessible, and study-friendly report higher satisfaction [2]. In digital contexts, platform usability and technological infrastructure significantly influence satisfaction with online and hybrid learning [25].

5.3. Social and Cultural Determinants

Strong support networks help students manage stress and engage more in campus life [31]. Peer collaboration fosters community and shared purpose, boosting satisfaction [32].

Cultural background shapes students' expectations and perceptions of academic satisfaction [33]. Collectivist cultures emphasize group belonging, respect for authority, and harmony, while individualist cultures prioritize autonomy, innovation, and personal achievement [34]. In

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contrast, students from individualist cultures may prioritize autonomy, innovation, and self-expression, framing satisfaction more in terms of personal achievement and freedom[34].

6. Consequences of Academic Satisfaction

6.1. Academic Performance

Academic satisfaction is strongly linked to academic performance, often measured by GPA or course achievement [35]. Students satisfied with their learning environment and instruction are more engaged, motivated, and confident, leading to better academic outcomes [6].

6.2. Psychological Well-being

Academic satisfaction also supports psychological well-being [36]. Satisfied students report lower stress, anxiety, and depression, while dissatisfaction links to emotional exhaustion and helplessness[36]. In contrast, academic dissatisfaction is often linked with emotional exhaustion, learned helplessness, and negative affect. Ritzhaupt [5]. emphasized that it fosters a sense of belonging and purpose, buffering mental distress, especially in competitive or resource-limited settings. Moreover, academic satisfaction serves as a protective factor during academic transitions.

6.3. Student Retention and Dropout

Academic satisfaction strongly predicts student retention [31]. According to Model of Student Departure [31], dissatisfied students tend to disengage, skip classes, and are more likely to drop out. Institutions with high student satisfaction scores consistently report better retention statistics, underscoring the practical value of monitoring and improving satisfaction [37].

6.4. Career Readiness and Post-Graduation Outcomes

Academic satisfaction positively influences career development and employability [35]. Wilcox & Nordstokke [6] observed that satisfied students are more confident, proactive in career planning, and report better employment outcomes. Alignment between academic content and career goals strengthens both academic and career satisfaction [27].

6.5. Institutional Implications

High satisfaction enhances institutional reputation, affecting rankings, recruitment, and alumni support [21]. National education authorities in countries like Finland, Korea, and Indonesia use satisfaction metrics for funding and accountability [38].

7. lications for Practice and Policy

Understanding academic satisfaction provides actionable insights for enhancing educational quality, student retention, and institutional success. The findings from this review point toward several evidence-based strategies that can guide educational practitioners, university administrators, and policymakers.

High-quality teaching remains one of the most influential institutional predictors of academic satisfaction . Align curricula with students' career goals and interests by integrating internships, flexible electives, and coherent course sequences to increase satisfaction (Kostagiolas et al., 2019). Offer personalized advising, mental health counseling, peer mentoring, and study skills training to support student well-being, especially for at-risk groups [27].

Institutions can take steps such as creating diverse learning communities and extracurricular engagement, and promoting psychological safety [2], where students feel comfortable asking questions and expressing themselves.

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Routine evaluation of academic satisfaction is essential for evidence-informed decision-making [5]. Use validated tools and analytics to regularly assess and track student satisfaction across programs and demographics, informing continuous improvement.

Mandate satisfaction reporting in national quality frameworks, promote equity-focused policies, and fund research on effective interventions to prioritize student satisfaction as a key educational outcome.

8. Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs, explore academic emotions and motivation, conduct cross-cultural studies, investigate online learning factors, examine institutional culture and leadership, and develop multi-dimensional satisfaction models using advanced analytic methods.

9. Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesized current empirical and theoretical research on academic satisfaction in higher education, covering its definitions, measurement tools, influencing factors, and outcomes. Academic satisfaction, a subjective and multidimensional construct grounded in theories like Expectation-Disconfirmation, Social Cognitive, and Self-Determination, reflects how well students' experiences meet their expectations and psychological needs. Measurement instruments such as the CSSQ, ASS, and NSSE reliably assess satisfaction across contexts. Influenced by personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy, personality), institutional elements (e.g., teaching quality, curriculum, support), and social-environmental supports (e.g., peer relations, inclusivity), academic satisfaction significantly impacts academic performance, well-being, retention, and career readiness. Emerging research highlights digital learning environments, academic emotions, and cross-cultural studies, with innovations like learning analytics and longitudinal tracking enhancing methodology. Despite progress, gaps remain—future work should emphasize longitudinal, experimental, and cross-national designs, develop multi-dimensional models, and examine the roles of institutional culture, leadership, and technologies such as AI in shaping academic satisfaction.

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