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A Relationship between Spiritual Intelligence and Psychological Capital with Academic Performance among Students in Kashan University of Medical Sciences in 2016

Hamid Rahimi [1*]

[1]Humantic College, University of Kashan, Kashan, Iran.

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Abstract

Background and objectives: Spiritual intelligence and psychological capital are an approach that help ones to adapt with environment, health, performance and creativity. Therefore, the purpose of this research was analysis of relationship between spiritual intelligence and psychological capital academic performance among students in Kashan University of Medical Sciences.

Martials and methods: The type of research was correlative descriptive. The statistical population consisted of students of Kashan University of Medical Sciences that 294 students were selected by stratified random sampling. The data collection tool was a spiritual intelligence questionnaire in 40 items and a psychological capital inventory questionnaire in 24 items with five degrees Likert scale. The validity of the contents of tools was verified. Reliability was estimated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient for spiritual intelligence 0.82 and psychological capital of 0.91. Data analysis was done at descriptive and inferential level using SPSS software version 22.

Results: The findings showed that means of spiritual intelligence components (3.20±0.50) and psychological capital (3.51±0.41) were higher than average (3). Also there are significant and positive relation between spiritual intelligence with academic performance (r=0.25) and psychological capital with academic performance (r=0.19).

Conclusion: According to the findings, spiritual intelligence and higher psychological capital were associated with better academic performance. By improving the dimensions of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital, it is possible to improve the academic performance of students.

[*]***Corresponding Author***: Hamid Rahimi, ***Email:*** dr.hamid.rahimi@kashanu.ac.ir

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Introduction

One of the efficiency criteria of each educational system is evaluation of educational performance. In addition, attention to effective factors for educational advancement is one of the most important goals in planning of educational systems due to the fact that academic underachievement and failure of students lead to huge financial and spiritual costs for educational system of any country. In addition to the reduction of motivation and self-confidence of students, academic failure can seriously threaten the general and mental health of these individuals. Therefore, it is essential to identify the factors affecting the educational success of students to maintain their scientific ability and improve their health as the human resource of the educational system and to prevent wasting financial resources.

On the other hand, educational systems have not been able to completely overcome the academic failure of students since it has been only attempted to change the educational contents of courses. Meanwhile, it is important to modify the learning processes and focus on students as the basis of training programs (2). Moreover, emphasis on psychological dimensions of learning and opinions of social-cognitive theorists about the effect of thoughts of students on their behaviors and learning is of paramount importance. For many years, it has been asserted that academic advancement is affected by cognitive abilities, which are measured by assessing the mean high school grades and academic achievement tests. In addition, cognitive abilities have been regarded as the best predictor of academic success of students. Nevertheless, use of cognitive abilities as the only tool for prediction of academic advancement of student cannot lead to the provision of a complete image of academic enhancement of high school and university students (2).

According to the literature, academic advancement is a complicated subject affected by cognitive, social and psychological dimensions, which can be explained by various structures (3). Some of the psychological structures, which can improve the educational performance of students, are spiritual intelligence and psychological capital. Psychological capital is identified as developmental state of individuals as characterized by believing in their abilities in achieving goals, persevering toward goals, creating positive documents about

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themselves, and being able to endure problems (4). This concept is determined based on some characteristics, including having the necessary self-confidence and being able to put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks (self-efficiency), optimism, hope and resiliency (5).

In addition, psychological capital is the positive aspect of life of people and is based on understanding oneself, having goals to succeed and sustainability against problems (6). In fact, psychological capital can be considered as essential and important features and skills, which can decrease the vulnerability of students in educational environment against academic stressful events that result in decreased academic depression (7). According to the results of studies conducted in this area, students with higher levels of psychological capital can experience more satisfaction, joy, and welfare, and obtain better grades in the learning environment (8).

Avey *et al*. have defined four major components for psychological capital, including self-efficiency (with an emphasis on commitment and effort to succeed in challenging tasks), optimism (or positive thinking, based on optimistic documents about the present and future successes), hope (persistence in achieving goals and changing the path to succeed, if necessary), and resiliency (flexibility and persevering against difficulties in the path of success) (9). In addition, there is an increased need to discuss various aspects of spirituality and spiritual intelligence in the modern world. Spiritual intelligence is indicative of a series of abilities, capacities and resources, use of which in daily life can lead to increased adaptability of individuals. In the available definitions of spiritual intelligence, the main focus is on solving the present problems and finding a purpose in actions and events of everyday life (10).

This concept is used to increase well-being in daily life, and develops abilities and behaviors in individuals to adapt effectively and solve problems (11). From the perspective of Sisk, spiritual intelligence can be identified as deep self-awareness, which results in more realization of the dimensions of oneself (12). According to Vaughan, spiritual intelligence is regarded as the ability to deeply understand existential questions and have insights into different levels of consciousness (13). On the other hand, spirituality is defined by some of the psychologists as the constant effort of man to answer the whys of life (14). Various opinions have been presented regarding the components of spiritual intelligence; in this

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regard, Emmons introduced these components to be transcendent capacity, sacrifice, consciousness, ability to use spiritual sources to solve problems, and pious behaviors, including forgiveness, appreciation, humility, and compassion.

Consciousness is defined as awareness of an ultimate truth, which creates unity and is awareness of the reality; a sense of unity where all boundaries are disappeared and a single unit is created. Another component of spiritual intelligence is sanctifying the daily affairs, meaning that in addition to a specific purpose, all of the tasks performed by an individual have a general and sacred goal as well. An action performed with a sacred purpose has a different quality. The fourth component of spiritual intelligence is the relationship between religion and spirituality and problem-solving skills. Many people use their religious beliefs in making sense of the various phenomena of life, which might be difficult to comprehend. This use of religious beliefs can improve their sustainability to a great extent. Emmons introduced the fifth component of spiritual intelligence to be pious traits, including forgiveness, gratefulness, sacrifice and sacred love (15).

A combination of factors relating to spiritual intelligence and psychological capital, along with other aspects, has a significant effect on academic performance of students. Importance of these variables is determined by referring to the modern studies, in which the impact of these factors on improved academic performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of staff and success of managers are investigated (16). Academic advancement is one of the most important outcomes of educational systems for each individual and society. In addition, recognition of effective components leads to providing a suitable condition for training literate and creative individuals in medical sciences, which uses a great amount of financial assets to educate well-trained human resources, who will provide health-related cares for the community.

Therefore, strengthening and improving the spiritual intelligence and psychological capital and their components might be a suitable method to deal with problems and have a significant impact on educational performance of individuals. Given the importance of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital in various aspects of life, and different results obtained regarding their impact on educational performance of students, this study aimed to evaluate the association and comparison between

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academic performance of students and variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital in Kashan University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted to evaluate the relationship between academic performance of students and variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital in Kashan University of Medical Sciences. The applied research method was used according to the study goal, and the research was implemented based on a descriptive-correlational design.

At first, it was essential to perform a preliminary study on a number of students due to unclear variance of the statistical society. Therefore, 30 students were randomly selected, and research questionnaires were distributed among them. After extraction of data related to the responses of the mentioned group and pre-calculation of variance (0.22), level of significance (0.95), community size (2457) and error rate (0.05), sample size was estimated at 297 cases using Cochran formula. In addition, proportional stratified sampling was used since students were from different genders and fields of study, and the statistical society was heterogeneous to some extent.

In total, 67 out of 545 students from the school of health, 62 out of 514 students from the school of nursing and midwifery, 57 out of 475 students from the school of medicine, 53 out of 440 paramedical students, and 58 out of 482 students from school of dentistry were selected. Sample size was estimated at 297 cases; however, 294 questionnaires were returned by the subjects. Given the return rate of the questionnaires, which was reported to be 0.99, data analysis was performed on 294 students, and statistical power and level of significance were estimated at 0.89 after preliminary analysis of the calculation and its adequacy. Data collection tools included integrated spiritual intelligence scale (ISIS) by Amram and Dryer (17), containing 40 items on five components (transcendent capacity, sacrifice, consciousness, solving life problems, and pious behaviors), psychological capital questionnaire (PCQ) by Luthans *et al*. (2007), consisting of 24 items on four components (hope, resiliency, optimism and self-efficiency), and academic performance inventory, which were applied after assessing the total score of the passed courses. Scale of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital was scored based on

five-score Likert-scale (5. Completely agree, 4. Agree, 3. No comment, 2. Disagree, 1. Completely disagree). In this scale, responders expressed their perception of various issues ranging from one to five. Given the five-degree nature of the scale, the researcher regarded the hypothetical community at 3. Mean of each component was determined separately and was compared to hypothetical mean of 3. In this regard, means higher than 3 were regarded as desirable situation, whereas those below 3 were introduced as unfavorable condition of variables.

Validity of ISIS (Amram and Dryer) (17) was estimated simultaneously with life satisfaction and spiritual experience questionnaire in a narrative form. However, validity of the tools applied in the present study was evaluated by professors and specialists of this field in content form. Reliability coefficient of ISIS was estimated at 0.97. In the current research, reliability of spiritual intelligence was generally 0.82, and separately 0.84, 0.78, 0.86, 0.90 and 0.81 for components of transcendent capacity (12 items), sacrifice (6 items), consciousness (4 items), solving life issues (10 items) and pious behaviors (8 items), respectively. On the other hand, reliability of psychological capital was generally 0.91 (24 items) and separately 0.83, 0.71, 0.82 and 0.84 for components of hope, resiliency, optimism and self-efficiency (each component: 6 items), respectively, which was at a significant level (P=0.001) and indicative of high reliability of measurement tools. At first, permissions for conducting the research were obtained from the authorities of Kashan University of Medical Sciences, followed by obtaining informed consents from all of the participants. In addition, subjects were assured of the confidentiality terms regarding their personal information (questionnaires without names). An appropriate duration was regarded for completing the questionnaire. After explaining the objectives of the research, the researcher distributed the questionnaires among the subjects and collected them after 2 weeks.

Data analysis was performed in SPSS version 22 at two descriptive (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential (Pearson's correlation coefficient, one-sample t-test, regression and multivariate analysis of variance). In this research, one-sample t-test was applied to compare means of variables and components of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital with hypothetical mean. In addition, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the association

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between academic performance and variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital. Moreover, regression and multivariate analysis of variance were applied in order to predict academic performance by referring to the variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital and comparison of means of the variables based on demographic characteristics (gender, field of study and educational level).

Results

In this research, a total of 294 students were evaluated, 58% of whom were female and 42% were male. In terms of educational level, 56%, 31% and 13% of the subjects were undergraduates, graduates and PhD candidates, respectively. Regarding field of study, 21%, 22%, 18% and 39% of the participants were studying in fields of nursing, health, paramedical and medicine, respectively. Mean and standard deviation of each variable and component and results of one-sample t-test are separately presented in Table 1 to compare means of variables and components of spiritual intelligence, psychological capital, and academic performance.

Table 1: one sample t-test to compare mean of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital

Variable	n	Mean	df	t	*P*-Value
Transcendence	294	3.50±0.77	11.25	293	0.001
Sacrifice	294	3.36±0.60	10.40	293	0.001
Consciousness	294	3.37±0.75	12.6	293	0.001
Problem Solving	294	3.17±0.84	2.43	293	0.028
Pious Behaviors	294	3.09±0.64	4.27	293	0.001
Spiritual Intelligence	294	3.20±0.50	6.53	293	0.001
Hope	294	3.53±0.61	15	293	0.001
Resilience	294	3.71±0.57	22.4	293	0.001
Optimism	294	3.48±0.67	12.34	293	0.001
Self-Efficacy	294	3.23±0.86	4.5	293	0.001
Psychological Capital	294	3.51±0.41	20.14	293	0.001

One sample t-test and $p < 0.05$ is significant

Evaluation of results presented in Table 1 demonstrated that mean components of spiritual intelligence (3.20±0.50) and psychological capital (3.51±0.41) was below 3. The highest means in variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital was related to transcendent capacity (3.50±0.77) and hope (3.53±0.61), respectively. According to the results of t-test, it was indicated that means of all components and variables were at the significant error level (0.05), which confirmed the hypothesis of the

researcher. Correlation coefficients of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital with academic performance, along with the coefficient of determination, are provided in Table 2. According to the data presented in Table 2, a positive and significant relationship was observed between spiritual intelligence and academic performance (r=0.25) and psychological capital and academic performance (r=0.19). On the other hand, the coefficient of determination indicated a mutual variance between spiritual intelligence and academic performance (0.0625) and between physiological capital and academic performance (0.0361).

Table 2: correlation coefficient between spiritual intelligence and psychological capital with academic performance

Variable	R	R^2	P-value
Spiritual Intelligence & academic performance	0.25	0.0625	0.024
Psychological Capital & academic performance	0.19	0.0361	0.031

Correlation coefficient and p < 0.05 is significant

Coincidence regression coefficients of each of the variables are presented in Table 3 to determine the relative share of each variable of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital in prediction of academic performance of students. The regression table revealed that only spiritual intelligence (B=0.50, P=0.01) had the ability to predict the academic performance of students and can be used in regression model. In addition, multivariate analysis of variance was used based on Table 4 to compare the mean of each variable based on demographic characteristics (gender, field of study and educational level). In Table 4, multivariate analysis of variance demonstrated no significant difference between spiritual intelligence of students according to their gender (F=2.66). However, this difference was significant according to the field of study (F=8.7) and educational level (F=6.3). On the other hand, no significant difference was found between physiological capital of students according to their gender (F=0.516). Meanwhile, the mentioned difference was significant according to the field of study (F=27.16) and educational level (F=2.86). Moreover, a significant difference was observed between academic performance of students according to their gender (F=18), educational level (F=7.21) and field of study (F=2.8).

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Table 3:regression coefficient to predicting performance on base spiritual intelligence and psychological capital with

Variable	B	Std-Error	Beta	t	*P*-Value
Constant	17.55	0.90	-	19.54	0.001
Spiritual Intelligence	0.50	0.19	0.25	2.68	0/01
Psychological Capital	0.10	0.23	0.19	1.88	0.08

Regression coefficient and p < 0.05 is significant

Table 4: comparison of variable means in terms of demographic traits

Variable		Sum of Square	df	Mean of Square	F	*P*-value
Spiritual Intelligence	sex	0.603	1	0.603	2.66	0.10
	field	5.92	3	1.97	8.7	0.001
	level	2.86	2	1.43	6.3	0/002
Psychological Capital	sex	0.067	1	0.067	0.516	0.473
	field	10.56	3	3.52	27.16	0.001
	level	0.741	2	0.37	2.86	0.049
academic performance	sex	41.76	1	41.76	18	0.001
	field	19.4	3	6.47	2.8	0.04
	level	33.42	2	16.7	7.21	0.001

Multivariate and *P* < 0.05 is significant

Discussion

According to the results of the present study, the components of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital of students in Kashan University of Medical Sciences were at a desirable state. High rate of spiritual intelligence in students was predictable due to religiousness and tendency toward spiritual values in our society. According to Islamic teachings, human is created to remember God and pay attention to him. In addition, following the principles of spirituality is innate and promotes prosperity and spiritual intelligence or spiritual wisdom (18). In terms of spiritual intelligence dimension, it could be stated that students have the ability to deal with problems, performing their tasks in the best way while considering and adhering to moral queries in their behaviors. This means that they can help others greatly, and even

accept criticism from other people and correct their behaviors. In this regard, Mohebbi marked that nursing and midwifery students had a high level of spiritual intelligence (19).

Moreover, Pesut affirmed that nursing students had high spiritual perception, and considered spiritual considerations even better than nursing instructions (20). Similar results were obtained by Raghib, demonstrating relatively high spiritual intelligence of students of University of Isfahan, Iran (21). In terms of psychological capital, results indicated that students can solve serious problems with full confidence, determine their life goals, discuss their issues with others, follow their academic purposes, claim that there are many techniques to solve a problem, manage various problems, consider only the positive aspects of a task and regard their academic affairs as the best part of their lives.

Robbins (2012) asserted that having psychological capital enables individuals to better deal with stressful conditions, be less intense, have a high ability against problems, obtain a clear view of themselves, and be less affected by everyday life events. Therefore, these individuals will have better psychological health (22). According to the results of the present study, a positive and significant relationship was observed between academic performance and variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital. In other words, the more the components of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital increase in students, the better will be their academic performance. Therefore, it could be concluded that academic performance of students is due to spiritual intelligence and psychological capital to some extent. The hidden belief behind this hypothesis is that all people have various levels of spiritual intelligence, growth of which depends on education. It could be stated that fostering of this intelligence and other intelligences is regarded as an important and key factor for improved academic performance. On the other hand, it could be concluded that spiritual intelligence and physiological capital can increase the performance of individuals in all aspects of life, including academic performance, due to providing self-awareness, flexibility, hope, resiliency, consciousness, and the ability to solve problems for people, and creating an overall view of life, experiences, and events.

According to the mentioned results, it could be stated that students with high psychological capital, who have a high capacity of hope, work hard to achieve their

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goals and have the ability to find alternative routes to obtain their goals when faced with problems in their path (23). In addition, students with higher hope levels can focus better on their goals and be more motivated, compared to their peers. These individuals have serious determination in performing their tasks since they believe that effort leads to enhancement and satisfaction. In other words, as a positive psychological power, hope motivates people, which leads them toward success and more effort in this regard. Moreover, people with high psychological capital, who have strong self-efficacy beliefs, are assured of their capabilities to achieve their academic goals and gain skill and proficiency in learning assignments to successfully perform challenging tasks. In this respect, Bandura (2005) stated that self-efficiency acts in coordination with target systems, improving the motivation and performance of students through increasing their effort and sustainability. Moreover, optimism of individuals, along with their high psychological capital, increases perceived educational control and creates positive documents of current and future successes and failures (22).

As a result, they make better efforts in their academic activities, welcome challenges and expect to be successful. In addition, high resilience capacity in these individuals results in different reasoning and attitudes when faced with academic challenges or barriers in other situations. In this intellectual processing, there is a higher emphasis on evaluation and processing of problems in a creative and new manner instead of focusing on the problem and its consequences. These individuals regard risky activities not as threat but as an opportunity (25). In line with our findings, Sakiz (2011) marked a positive and significant association between self-efficiency and academic performance (26). In addition, Mohebbi *et al*. (2013) demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between psychological capital and its components with academic performance of students.

On the other hand, combination of four variables of hope, optimism, resiliency and self-efficiency can better predict the academic performance of students (2). In this regard, Molazade (2013) concluded that there is an association between academic achievements according to grade point average of students and dimensions of spiritual intelligence (27). However, inconsistent with our findings, Shahbazi Rad and Karami (2013) and Raeisi *et al*. (2013) observed no significant

relationship between spiritual intelligence and academic performance (28, 29).

According to the results of the current research, no significant difference was observed between spiritual intelligence and psychological capital of students according to their gender. Nevertheless, there was a significant difference in this regard according to the field of study and educational level. In other words, it could be stated that gender had no specific effect on increase or decrease of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital, whereas field of study and educational level had significant impacts on increase or decrease of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital. This lack of difference between female and male individuals in terms of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital might be due to their religious attitudes, which provides an equal opportunity to have a high level of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital by accepting spirituality as the main principle of life. Therefore, there is no significant difference in this respect.

Another cause of this lack of difference is the fact that spiritual intelligence is a capacity for inspiration, which searches for an answer for all fundamental questions of life with intuition and a holistic approach to the universe. Another cause of this lack of consistency was expressed by Yong, who pointed out that significant changes occur in an individual after the age of 80 years, which might affect his spirituality and spiritual intelligence. With regard to the age of the study population, which was mostly below 80 years, no specific difference was supposed to be observed in spiritual intelligence of the subjects in terms of gender (30). In congruence with our findings, Shahbazirad and Karami found no difference between male and female participants regarding spiritual intelligence (28). Inconsistent with the results of the present study, Kajbaf , Raisi *et al*. and Mohhebi demonstrated a significant relationship between spiritual intelligence and variables of gender, educational level, and field of study (21). In addition, Abdoli marked a significant difference between spiritual intelligence and various educational levels (32).

According to the results of the current research, a significant difference was found between academic performance of students according to gender, educational level, and field of study. It could be stated that gender, field of study and educational level play a significant role in increase or decrease of academic performance of individuals. This

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significant difference in academic performance of male and female students might be related to higher level of achievement motivation in female students, compared to male students. Over the past few years, there has been an increasing attendance of females in universities, and society does not discriminate people based on educational level, occupation and gender. In line with the results obtained by Shahbazirad and Karami and Aghamirzayi and Salehi Omran, a significant difference was observed between male and female students with various fields of study in terms of educational level (28, 33). Some of the major drawbacks of this research included the use of self-reporting questionnaires for evaluation of the variables, limitation of study population to students of Kashan University of Medical Sciences, cross-sectional data collection and use of correlation plan for showing the relationship between the variables, since clarification of the relationship between the variables requires longitudinal studies. Given the important and effective role of religious and spiritual issues in improving the academic performance of students, it is recommended that new syllabus, books or educational contents be designed by educational designers of Islamic education books of universities using their own innovations to transfer valuable issues, including religion, to students in an interesting manner.

Moreover, knowledge of students must be raised in terms of performing academic tasks while considering the positive features in their characteristic and beliefs and using all of their talents to grow and improve as far as possible. In addition, they need to know that they can rely on their resiliency in work and use their religious and spiritual beliefs in order to have more academic achievements in life. Moreover, creation of a supportive and appropriate foundation and educational environment, which increases the positive spirit of students, can help to improve their internal motivation, active participation in academic affairs, sustainability in dealing with academic challenges and barriers and perception of academic contents, all of which can eventually lead to academic achievement. It is suggested that the effect of cultural, environmental, family, professors, and friends on spiritual intelligence and psychological capital of individuals be assessed in future studies. Moreover, performing necessary interventions to teach spiritual intelligence and psychological capital through holding educational workshop can lead to the assessment of their effects on improved

academic performance of students and even other aspects of life.

In conclusion, it seems that the society and educational organizations play a significant role in applicability of knowledge and cognitive abilities of individuals. In the area of spiritual intelligence and psychological capacity, it is recommended that educational units be guided toward a path, in which principles and regulations become more applicable to be used by individuals in everyday life events and educational affairs.

Conclusion

According to the results of the current research, mean components of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital of university students was higher than medium, at an acceptable level in students of Kashan University of Medical Sciences. In addition, a positive and significant relationship was observed between academic performance of students and the variables of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital. Increase of spiritual intelligence and psychological capital can lead to improved educational performance of students.

Our findings were indicative of the importance of psychological capital and spiritual intelligence in educational performance of students. In fact, psychological capital and spiritual intelligence equip students with thoughts, beliefs and constructional behaviors, which can empower students to deal with stressful educational events with less vulnerability. Therefore, having psychological capital and spiritual intelligence can associate with positive outcomes, one of which is improved educational performance. It should be noted that psychological capital and spiritual intelligence and their components can grow, and there are clear guidelines and successful strategies in the literature of positive psychology for increase of hope, optimism, resiliency, self-efficiency, sacrifice, and transcendent capacity.

According to the results of the current research, it could be concluded that planning to increase psychological capital and spiritual intelligence of students can lead to increased commitment and efforts of students to perform their challenging assignments and gain academic achievements. In addition, this planning can result in the creation of positive documents in the area of success and current and future failures, sustainability in the path of educational goals and change of path to achieve educational success when necessary.

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