Determinants of Student Success at a South African University: An Econometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT South Africa needs more higher education graduates with the capability to adapt to and function in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent economy and society. High dropout and failure rates, as well as the slow progression of students, have revealed themselves as complex, persistent challenges and seemingly intractable crises at South African universities. To identify determinants of management studies student success, this study fits the student records data in two different educational production functions applying two econometric approaches, namely, Ordinary Least Squares and Logistic Regression models. Results of Ordinary Least Squares and Logistic Regression analyses confirmed that key determinants of student success are total matriculation points, matriculation Maths and English I scores, and having English as home first language. Other personal and student demographic variables play some role in determining university success. Exogenous factors such as the institutional environment, intellectual leadership, a proper learning infrastructure and environment at the university, socio-economic characteristics, and psychological attitudes also play an important role in predicting student success. The contention is, these determinants of student success are not straightforward measures of student quality as they are the sum of complex and multifaceted factors, making the prediction of student success a far more complex and multifaceted process demanding further investigation. These implications should be explored and integrated into the educational policy-making process and strategic planning to reverse the trends of high dropout and failure rates at South African universities.