

REVIEW ARTICLE

The relationship with parents and the impact on adolescent academic performance

La relación con los padres y el impacto en el rendimiento escolar del adolescente

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Abstract

School performance expresses what a person has learned as a result of an instruction or training process. It is considered multifactorial, with the most important aspects being: Personal, family and academic, also considered as factors that influence school failure. For this research, it is important to know the impact that the family relationship with their parents has on the students on their school performance, focusing mainly on the situation of the General Secondary School “Mata Redonda”, with this objective the Sacks Sentence Completion Test was applied to 36 first grade secondary school students with an average less than or equal to 6.9. The instrument used consists of a 60-item questionnaire that aims to obtain data on four areas that represent the subject's adaptation: family, sex, interpersonal relationships and self-concept. After applying the test, it was concluded that the students studied within the sample do manifest emotional conflicts, both with the maternal and paternal figure, whether due to neglect, economic deprivation, alcohol and substance abuse, family disintegration and, most significantly, abandonment situations. Men are the ones who show the highest incidence of conflicts.

Keywords: Sacks sentence completion test; academic performance; secondary education; educational underachievement

Resumen

El rendimiento escolar expresa lo que una persona ha aprendido como resultado de un proceso de instrucción o de formación, se considera multifactorial, siendo los aspectos más importantes: Personales, familiares y académicos, considerándose también como factores que influyen en el fracaso escolar. Para la presente investigación es importante conocer el impacto que produce en el alumno la relación familiar con sus padres en su desempeño escolar, enfocándose principalmente en la situación de la Escuela Secundaria General “Mata Redonda”, con este objetivo se les aplicó el Test de Frases Incompletas de Sacks a 36 alumnos de primer grado de secundaria con promedio inferior o igual a 6.9. El Instrumento utilizado consiste en un cuestionario de 60 ítems que tienen como finalidad obtener datos sobre cuatro áreas que representan la adaptación del sujeto: familia, sexo, relaciones interpersonales y concepto de sí mismo. Tras aplicar el test se concluyó que los alumnos estudiados dentro de la muestra sí manifiestan conflictos emocionales, tanto con la figura materna como paterna ya sea por descuido, carencias económicas, abuso de alcohol y sustancias, desintegración familiar y lo más significativo por situaciones de abandono. Siendo los varones los que muestran mayor incidencia de conflictos.

Palabras clave: test de frases incompletas de Sacks; desempeño académico; educación secundaria; bajo rendimiento educativo

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INTRODUCTION

Existing literature suggests that, in the academic environment, skill and effort are not equivalent terms, according to various authors, effort alone does not guarantee academic success, while the student skills begin to gain relevance and recognition within the classroom (López & Gómez, 2022). Nowadays, it is common that the student's effort is valued more than their demonstrated capabilities; in the same way, it has been highlighted that school performance is a manifestation of what is learned as a result of a process of instruction or training (Martínez & Ruiz, 2021); however, it is possible to observe that good intellectual capacity and aptitude do not always translate into high academic achievement.

School performance is a multi-factorial phenomenon that involves personal, family, and academic aspects; these three main elements play a fundamental role in the educational process (Fernández & Martínez, 2021), and their influence can be decisive in cases of academic failure.

Academic failure is understood as the inability of the individual to reach the expected achievements according to their abilities, which may be related to possible alterations in their personal development (González & Pérez, 2023).

Academic achievement is reflected in the grades obtained by students during the teaching-learning process, although taking numerical grades at the end of the school cycle as a reference may seem a limited approach, it is valuable when used to unravel a reality that goes beyond the adolescent themselves. This

makes possible to understand school achievement as a qualitative process, in which both subjective and objective elements present throughout the educational process are considered, thus making it possible to evaluate the quality of the education provided (López & García, 2022).

Academic achievement is a central concept in both education and psychology that stands out due to its importance in the evaluation of the effectiveness and quality of educational processes, since the grades obtained are not only the result of the efforts of educational institutions, and in particular, of teachers (Mendoza & Torres, 2023), but also function as an indicator and guide to the processes and products of an educational system; in addition, they allow informed decisions about teacher performance and the system as a whole (Álvarez & Ramírez, 2024).

During adolescence, it is common for academic performance and school achievement to experience a significant decline, as mentioned, at this stage the interests of adolescents focus on aspects such as self-image, progressive separation from the influence of parents and childhood teachers, belonging to a group, and the search for acceptance, as well as the first love experiences (García & Martínez, 2022). These new priorities can lead the adolescent to lose interest or motivation for study, as their attention is focused on resolving affective issues (Pérez & Fernández, 2023).

Middle school represents the last level of basic education and is offered in three modalities: general, technical and “telesecundaria” (a model that

combines distance and classroom learning). Each of these modalities covers three school cycles, during which adolescents are expected to acquire the fundamental tools for their future life; in Mexico, the universalization of elementary education has led to a significant growth in secondary education enrollment (González & Morales, 2021). In the 2005-2006 school year, this educational level covered almost six million adolescents in more than 32 thousand schools throughout the country, ranging from large urban schools to “telesecundarias” in remote communities (Ramírez & López, 2023). However, despite this expansion, challenges persist, such as the high dropout rate, with six out of every one hundred students dropping out of secondary school, partly due to the high failure rate (INEGI, 2024).

Parental involvement in their children's education is an essential factor, ranging from home training to commitment to school activities. This includes attending sports competitions, meetings with teachers and parent training courses (Sánchez & Fernández, 2022). It has been shown that students perform better when there is mutual understanding between parents and teachers about expectations and when there is constant communication about learning habits and academic progress (Vargas & Moreno, 2023). Teachers tend to communicate more with parents when they perceive that parents value such interaction, and it is most effective when it flows in both directions, differentiating between efforts to inform parents and those to encourage a bi-directional communication (García & López, 2024).

During adolescence, family and school contexts play a fundamental role in the psychological adjustment of the individual; previous research has shown that the existence of communication problems between parents and adolescent children is one of the family's risk factors most closely linked to the development of mental health problems in young people, such as depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress (Serrano & Jiménez, 2023). In the school setting, several factors that can negatively affect adolescent psychological adjustment have also been identified, such as low academic self-esteem and social integration problems, as well as peer victimization (Molina & Ramírez, 2024).

A study by Estevez and Misuti (2022) analyzed the influence of family communication (with father and mother separately) and school adjustment (school self-esteem and victimization problems) on adolescent mental health, evaluating indicators of psychological distress such as depressive symptomatology and perceived stress; the results of this study indicate that family and school factors are intertwined, and jointly contribute to the prediction of psychological distress, in particular, it is inferred that communication problems in the family context can trigger adjustment difficulties in the school environment, which, in turn, have a negative impact on the adolescent's mental health.

In a study of 1,417 adolescents of the low socioeconomic status, aged between 13 and 17 years, from 22 municipalities of the island of Tenerife, the relationship between the quality of parent-child

relationships and the adoption of lifestyles was analyzed (García, 2023). The results indicated that, at the beginning of adolescence, the lifestyles of the young people are generally healthy: no consumption of tobacco, alcohol or drugs is observed, no sexual relations have been initiated, there is satisfaction with body image, study is combined with leisure activities such as watching television or using the computer, and there is good communication and support from both parents, which is associated with good school adjustment.

However, during middle adolescence, a deterioration in lifestyles begins to show: adolescents start the consumption of tobacco and alcohol, although the latter moderately during weekends, in addition to increased knowledge of pregnancy prevention methods, contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases, and a significant portion of the adolescents in the study initiate an active sexual life (Gómez & Martínez, 2023). Girls, in particular, tend to show dissatisfaction with their body image, present irregularities in meals, and sometimes experience feelings of loneliness, which puts them at risk of developing eating disorders or eating behavior disorders; on the other hand, boys present greater difficulties in their adaptation to the school environment and show lower academic achievement, which can lead them to experience situations of school failure, shared by 38% of students in Spain, and a possible early dropout (Ruiz & Sanchez, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, academic performance is the result of the interaction of

multiple factors, such as IQ, motivation towards school work, self regulation capacity, and the relations with peers and family; given the above, it is relevant to research the impact that the family relationship, particularly with parents, has on students' academic performance.

METHODS, TECHNIQUES, AND INSTRUMENTS

The present research is correlational with a quasi-experimental design. The study population includes 103 first grade students (secondary education has three grades) from the Escuela Secundaria General (General Secondary School) "Mata Redonda", with a sample composed of 36 students who obtained a grade point average (GPA) of 6.9 or less. The Sacks Incomplete Sentences Test was applied and interpreted by psychologists, to obtain, according to the parameters, if there is a disturbance in any adaptive area of the subject; among those mentioned: family, sexuality, interpersonal relationships and self-perception, this evaluation is intended to know the relationship that exists with the father and mother of the student; in addition, the grades of the students were requested to the Principal Office (previous authorization) to identify those with a GPA lower than 6.9 and correlate the study variables.

This test is composed of 60 incomplete sentences divided into the following categories:

- Relationships with parents: designed to explore the individual's feelings and perceptions of their parents.

- Family Relationships: inquire about relationships with other family members.
- Interpersonal Relationships: shows how the individual perceives and manages their relationships with friends, co-workers, and other people in their social environment.
- Perception of Self: explores self-esteem, self-concept and how the individuals see themselves.
- Sexuality: provide information on attitudes and conflicts related to sexuality.

Thus, it helps to separate the direct influence of the relationship with parents from other areas of the individual's life by categorizing and analyzing the responses according to the different spheres of life that the test explores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the analysis of the data, it was identified that, out of a total of 103 first grade students, 36 presented an GPA of less than 6.9, which represents 37% of the sample. Although this percentage could suggest that few students have low academic performance, it is important to consider that, due to the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 and the agreements both internal and external to the institution to avoid school dropout, no grade was lower than six, in addition, constant opportunities for regularization were provided to improve GPAs.

In the selected sample, it is observed that the majority of students with low academic performance are males compared to females, as shown in Figure 1.

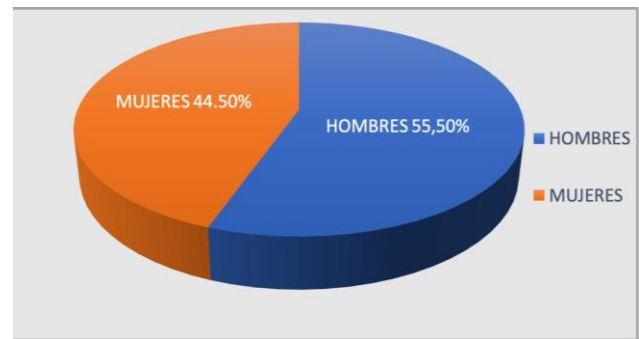


Figure 1. Distribution of the sample by gender

In relation to the quantitative results of the Sacks Incomplete Sentences Test, the data indicates conclusively that the participants present conflicts in the areas evaluated by the research; specifically, regarding the attitude of the students towards their parents, only 8.1% of the sample does not show any significant alteration in this area.

In contrast, 64.8% evidence a severe alteration in both areas, suggesting the need for therapeutic support to address the emotional conflicts present; in addition, 24.3% present a moderate alteration, indicating the existence of emotional conflicts, although these seem to be manageable without therapeutic intervention (Figure 2).

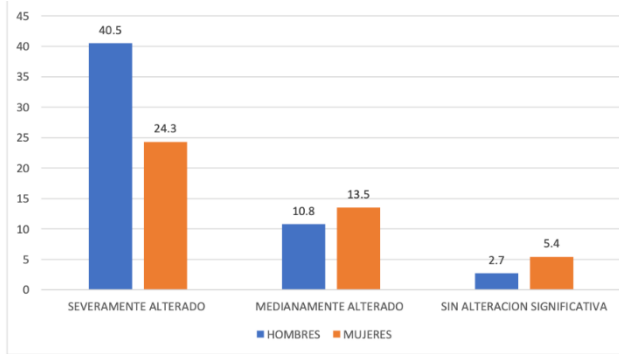


Figure 2. *Sacks Test results of students reporting conflicts*

This finding suggests that 89.1% of the sample presents manifest emotional conflicts, with a higher incidence in males, although the difference is not statistically significant, and is related to the low academic achievement observed in these students.

These results are consistent with the existing literature, which indicates that family relationships, and especially the relationship with parents, are a common source of emotional stress during adolescence and young adulthood; the low proportion of participants without alterations could also reflect a social and family environment where conflicts are more prevalent, which warrants consideration in the intervention and support provided to this population (López & Gámez, 2019).

On the other hand, the results of the participants with a severe alteration in both evaluated areas reinforce the urgent need for therapeutic interventions; these data not only confirm the presence of deep emotional conflicts, but also underline the severity of these, which could have significant repercussions on the long-term psychological well-being of the affected

individuals. In their study, González & Rodríguez (2021) mention that such severe alterations could be linked to dysfunctional communication patterns, unfulfilled expectations, or unresolved conflicts in the family nucleus, making imperative that this group receive specialized support that allows them to work on their internal conflicts and improve their family relationships.

Participants with moderate impairment indicate that, although emotional conflicts exist, they are not so severe as to require immediate therapeutic intervention; this group could benefit from emotional management and conflict resolution strategies to help them process and overcome their difficulties effectively, before these problems escalate. Serrano & Martinez (2020) indicate that, with the right support, individuals in this category can significantly improve their relationship with their parents, reducing the risk of conflicts escalating.

Overall, these results reflect a worrisome picture regarding the emotional health of the participants, particularly in relation to their parents. The differences in the levels of emotional disturbance underscore the importance of differentiated interventions tailored to the specific needs of each group, ranging from the promotion of coping skills for those with moderate disturbances to intensive therapeutic intervention for those who evidenced severe disturbances; this personalized approach is crucial to effectively address the emotional conflicts detected in this research.

CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained provide a comprehensive and worrying view of the emotional state of this population, revealing the prevalence of significant tensions in family relationships and underscoring the need for interventions that effectively address these problems. First, it is important to highlight that the minority did not present significant alterations in their relationship with their parents, indicating that most of the young people evaluated experienced some type of emotional conflict in this area.

The fact that more than half of the participants evidenced severe impairments in both areas evaluated is particularly alarming, not only confirming the existence of severe impairments but also the existence of deep emotional conflicts, but also underline the seriousness of these, which could have significant repercussions on the long-term psychological well-being of the affected individuals, and may be linked to dysfunctional communication patterns, unfulfilled expectations or unresolved conflicts within the family nucleus. Therefore, it is a priority for this group to receive specialized support that allows them to work on their internal conflicts and improve their family relationships. Therapeutic intervention in these cases is not only necessary, but urgent, to prevent the development of more serious psychological disorders and promote healthy emotional development.

On the other hand, the participants who presented moderate alterations indicate the presence of emotional conflicts that, although not so serious as to

require immediate therapeutic intervention, should not be dismissed, so this group could benefit significantly from emotional management and conflict resolution strategies to help them process and overcome their difficulties effectively, before these problems worsen. Overall, the results of this study highlight the high prevalence of emotional conflicts among the young people evaluated, particularly in their relationship with their parents, which raises a critical concern regarding the emotional well-being of this population.

The differences in the levels of emotional disturbance observed among participants underscore the importance of adopting a differentiated intervention approach, ranging from the promotion of coping skills for those with moderate disturbance to intensive therapeutic intervention for those with severe disturbance; this personalized approach is crucial to effectively address the emotional conflicts detected in this research, further reinforcing the need for a multidisciplinary approach in which mental health professionals, educators and families work together to provide the necessary support to these young individuals.

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