

ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

**Psychological Profile of English Pedagogy
Students: Attributional Styles, Academic Self-
Concept and Self-Esteem**

Perfil Psicológico de Estudiantes de Pedagogía Inglés: Estilos Atributivos, Autoconcepto Académico y Autoestima

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ABSTRACT This article examines the relationship between attributional styles, academic self-concept and self-esteem in university students of English Pedagogy. Their profiles in these variables were identified by using a quantitative descriptive-correlational approach and a sample of 125 students. In order to fulfill the objective of the study, descriptive and comparative analyses were performed through Student's t-test and ANOVA. Also, Pearson correlations were used to identify the link between the dimensions of the instruments with respect to the sociodemographic variables. The results showed that students tend to attribute their failures to lack of effort, lack of ability and moderate academic self-efficacy. Females evidenced greater attribution of failure due to lack of ability and family conflicts. Correlations were found between several dimensions, highlighting the negative relationship between internal causes and lack of effort. These findings provide relevant information for future educational interventions in similar samples.



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KEY WORDS Attributional styles; academic self-concept; self-esteem; university students.

RESUMEN Este artículo examina la relación entre los estilos atributivos, el autoconcepto académico y la autoestima en estudiantes universitarios de Pedagogía en Inglés. Mediante un enfoque cuantitativo descriptivo-correlacional y una muestra de 125 estudiantes, se identificaron sus perfiles en estas variables. Para cumplir con el objetivo del estudio se realizaron análisis descriptivos y comparativos a través de t Student y ANOVA. Del mismo modo, se efectuaron correlaciones de Pearson para identificar el vínculo entre las dimensiones de los instrumentos respecto a las variables sociodemográficas. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes tienden a atribuir sus fracasos a la falta de esfuerzo, falta de habilidad y autoeficacia académica moderada. Las mujeres evidenciaron mayor atribución de fracaso por falta de habilidad y conflictos familiares. Se hallaron correlaciones entre varias dimensiones, destacando la relación negativa entre causas internas y la falta de esfuerzo. Estos hallazgos aportan información relevante para futuras intervenciones educativas en esta población.

PALABRAS CLAVE Estilos atributivos; autoconcepto académico; autoestima; estudiantes universitarios.

1. Introduction

In academia, it is crucial to understand how students explain their successes and failures, as this significantly influences their motivation, cognition, and emotions. Attributional styles, which refer to the causes they attribute to their achievements and challenges, play a key role in this process. Similarly, academic self-concept and self-esteem are relevant aspects that may impact academic performance and life of students. In this study, fundamental aspects of the psychology of English Pedagogy students are addressed, analyzing their attributional styles, academic self-concept and self-esteem, as well as possible differences related to sociodemographic variables such as gender, age and years of training. In addition, the research seeks to understand the relationship between these factors and their influence on academic experience.

Attributional styles explain the motivation with which students face their academic tasks. They refer to the causes through which people explain their school successes and failures. For Weiner (1979) these causes would have important psychological consequences, at motivational, cognitive and emotional levels. At motivational level, these causes could enable, energize, or hinder actions that may lead students to face

their academic goals (Manassero and Vásquez, 1995). At the cognitive level, the causes would contribute to the actions taken by students, as well as to the expectations they have about their academic future, expressing them through feelings of hope or despair. Finally, at the emotional level, causality would be related to ego feelings, such as self-esteem or pride. For some authors such as Abramson et al. (1978), Inglés et al. (2012) and Lagos et al. (2016), attributions make up a certain pattern or attributional style, which, in the educational sphere, can favor or disfavor learning. Evidence indicates that the attribution of success or failure of past experiences can have consequences on the expectations regarding future successes or failures (Weiner, 1986, 2004). This process involves a motivational sequence that begins when a student achieves positive or negative results, which provokes the appearance of emotions, such as feelings of happiness in the case of success or frustration in the case of failure (Manassero and Vásquez, 1995).

In this context, not only will the academic results be important for the students, but also the cause for which they believe to have reached those results (Becerra and Reidl, 2015; Cerda and Vera-Sagredo, 2019). If students succeed, it will normally be associated to the existence of ability or hard work in academic tasks; however, if they fail, results will be related to low ability, lack of effort or simply bad luck (Valle et al., 1999). Thus, it could be fairly predicted that those students who attribute their results to effort, an internal, stable and controllable attribution, are more likely to succeed in their academic results than those students who attribute their results to luck, an external, unstable and uncontrollable cause. This would be explained by the fact that, the latter will make little effort in their schoolwork, since for them the results would not depend on the effort involved in the task, but on external and unmanageable aspects (Cheng and Furnham, 2017; Lagos et al., 2016; Weiner, 1985). At present, important evidence indicates that students with low academic performance present fundamentally external attributional patterns (Navarrete and Cuadro, 2007; Rodríguez and Guzmán, 2019). In contrast, students with good academic performance are characterized by attributing their success or failure to their own ability and effort (Cerda and Vera-Sagredo, 2019; González et al., 1999).

Students who make causal attributions of their success mainly to effort have higher levels of willingness to study strategies (Sáez et al., 2018) and present causal attributions that are directly related to high performance; meanwhile, students with external attributions would be a strong predictor of academic failure (Fernández et al., 2015). That is, students characterized by preferring attributions related to low autonomy would attribute their academic results, mainly, to uncontrollable factors (Durán-Aponte and Pujol, 2012).

Regarding academic self-concept, it has been determined that this variable is understood as the perception and evaluation that students have of their academic competencies (Álvarez et al., 2015). Véliz et al. (2020) state that self-concept is built by the experiences a person has had regarding their environment, where their own responses and those of the people who are significant in their life turn out to be relevant. These beliefs would be associated with motivation and performance, affecting the choice of activities to perform and the maintenance of their behavior, this means that the stronger the self-efficacy belief, the greater the effort and persistence to face school life (Cárcamo et al., 2020). Specifically, research in this line has revealed a positive relationship between academic self-concept and school achievement (Kumar and Choudhuri, 2017; Veas et al., 2019), since when students feel competent, they believe in their abilities, have high expectations accompanied by motivation to achieve goals and obtain a better learning (Chávez-Becerra et al., 2020). Consequently, this variable would be crucial in determining students' personality from an affective and motivational perspective (Morales, 2017). It has also been evidenced that self-concept has positive effects on the teacher-student relationship, on the relationship with peers, on participation in school activities and on the classroom climate (Huang et al., 2019). Similarly, this variable would be related to the way in which students deal with problems (González et al., 2012).

In relation to the academic self-concept of university students, some studies indicate that this variable would be directly related to academic performance (Gallardo et al., 2008; Gallardo et al., 2012; Ocampo et al., 2022), that it would influence critical thinking (Quispe-Farfán et al., 2021), that students with a high level of academic self-concept have lower levels of procrastination (Pichen-Fernandez and Turpo Chaparro, 2022), that lower self-concept is related to low learning goals (Suriá, 2023), and that females show higher academic self-concept than males (Sánchez-Zafra et al., 2022).

Also, it is interesting to explore the profile of university students with respect to self-esteem. In this regard, Tabernero et al. (2017) point out that self-esteem is understood as the affective or emotional aspect of the self that relates to how we feel and value ourselves. Recent international studies reveal significant relationships between self-esteem and academic achievement in students; in fact, it is considered as one of the main determinants of school performance (Akoul et al., 2020; Manne-Goehler et al., 2020; Metsäpelto et al., 2020; Muñoz, 2020; Ugwuanyi et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Self-esteem would not only influence academic achievements but would also mediate other aspects of the person such as social relationships (Harris and Orth, 2020), level of aspirations, expectations towards the future, stress-coping styles, risk taking, locus of control, personal assertiveness (Naranjo, 2007) and would even influence the levels of anxiety when taking academic exams (Freire et al., 2021).

Considering the above background, this study addresses the following research objectives: (1) To identify the profile of English Pedagogy students with respect to attributional styles, academic self-concept and self-esteem; (2) To analyze the statistically significant differences between the variables examined and sociodemographic data such as gender, age and years of training; (3) To determine the existence of relationships between attributional styles, academic self-concept and self-esteem and the sociodemographic data of the study.

2. Methodology

2.1 Method

To fulfill the objectives, a quantitative descriptive-correlational approach was used, with a cross-sectional design. With respect to the ethical regulations derived from international protocols for research of this type, informed consent was obtained from all participants, their collaboration was voluntary, and the confidentiality of their responses was guaranteed. In addition, an ethical certification was obtained from the university.

2.2 Sample

A non-probabilistic sample by convenience was used, which was made up of 125 English Pedagogy students from a university in the Biobío Region, Chile. Of the total sample, 82 (65.6%) were female and 43 (34.4%) were male. The students are between 17 and 36 years old with a mean of 20.8 years. Regarding distribution by year of training, 41 (32.8%) belong to first year; 23 (18.4%) to second year; 22 (17.6%) to third year; 25 (20%) to fourth year; and 14 (11.2) to fifth year.

2.3 Instruments

Attributional Styles Questionnaire. This instrument was originally developed by Alonso and Sanchez (1992) and validated in the Chilean context (Vera et al., 2021). It examines attributional styles of academic success and failure in students. The validated version in the Chilean context analyzes 26 items divided into five attributional styles, with a Likert-type format ranging from Highest Disagreement (1) to Highest Agreement (5). The relieved attributional styles correspond to: 1) Attribution of academic success to internal causes (8 items), with statements such as: "In general, if I have had a good mark, it has been mainly because of how intelligent I am"; 2) Attribution of failure to the teacher (5 items), with statements such as: "Often, if I have had bad marks, it has been because the teachers have not explained the contents well"; 3) Attribution of academic failure to lack of effort (6 items), with statements such as: "Usually, if I get a bad mark, it is because I have not studied hard enough"; 4) External-

ization and uncontrollability of academic results, mainly success (4 items), with statements such as: "I usually got good marks only because the contents to be learned were easy"; 5) Attribution of failure to lack of ability (3 items), with statements such as: "If I got bad marks, I would believe that I do not have the necessary talent to understand those subjects". The validation of the instrument in the Chilean context presented an adequate goodness of fit with χ^2 values 570.508, $p < .001$, CFI (.967), TLI (.949) and RMSEA (.038) and an adequate Cronbach's Alpha described by factors (Factor 1: .80; Factor 2: .81; Factor 3: .75; Factor 4: .67; Factor 5: .72) (Vera et al., 2021). For this research, 23 items more suitable for higher education students were used.

Academic Self-Concept Scale. This instrument was originally developed by Schmidt et al. (2008) and validated in the Chilean context by Méndez and Gálvez (2018). The instrument assesses the perception of students with respect to their performance and confidence in their abilities (self-efficacy). The scale has 14 items divided into two dimensions: Perceived performance (7 items), with statements such as, "I find it difficult to study"; and Academic self-efficacy (7 items) with statements such as, "If I dedicate myself thoroughly, I can study any subject". The statements are presented on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The psychometric properties of the scale show the presence of two factors with positive and moderate correlations ($r=.46$; $p < .005$) and adequate levels of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha Factor 1=.68 and Factor 2=.75).

Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (1967) for Adults (Format C). This instrument was validated by Lara et al. (1993) and was designed to assess the attitudes of adolescents and adults from 16 years of age. The scale comprises 25 items divided into three factors. The first, called "Personal", measures self-perception of physical and psychological characteristics, and consists of 13 items with statements such as: "If I have something to say, I generally say it". The second, called "Family", evaluates attitudes and experiences within the family context, and consists of 6 items with statements such as: "My parents understand me". Finally, the third, called "Social", evaluates attitudes in the social environment towards peers or friends, including experiences within university institutions in their professional training. It consists of 6 items, with statements such as: "Boys / girls generally accept my ideas". To perform the analysis, it should be considered that 8 items are true and 17 false; each correct answer is given 1 point that is multiplied by 4, considering that the maximum score is 100 points (Cronbach's Alpha Factor 1= .75, Factor 2=.78 and Factor 3=.89).

2.4 Procedure and data analysis

The application of the instruments was carried out massively and in online version to the group of English Pedagogy students. Firstly, descriptive analyses were carried out to know the students' profile in terms of the variables analyzed. Secondly, to evidence differences between groups of interest (sex, age and year of training), the means in each one of the dimensions was descriptively and comparatively examined to evaluate whether they differed significantly through Student's t-tests and ANOVA. Thirdly, to determine the relationships between the different dimensions of the instruments and the sociodemographic variables, the Pearson statistical test was used. Before performing the parametric tests, the assumptions of normality were examined through Kolmogorov-Smirnov; homogeneity through Levene's test; also, the independence of residuals was tested. The results of the above tests indicate the relevance of performing parametric tests. As a research protocol, the creation of a codebook was considered for the correct tabulation of the data. The analyses were performed with the SPSS v. 23.0 statistical package and the EQS® v. 6.2 program.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive analysis of the instrument variables

The following results show the descriptive analyses of the attributional styles, academic self-concept and self-esteem of English Pedagogy students. They show that the highest scores in relation to the number of items per dimension correspond to the attribution of academic failure to lack of effort, followed by the attribution of failure to lack of ability and finally, academic self-efficacy. This reveals that students would take responsibility for their academic failures, especially when they attribute them to lack of effort. It is also noted that they attribute their failure to lack of ability; however, they also point out that they are self-efficient in their academic performance. In all, students state that the teacher is not to be made responsible for their results.

Table 1

Descriptive analyses of the variables examined in English Medium Pedagogy students (Mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis).

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
			Statistical data	Standard error	Statistical data	Standard error
Attribution of academic success to internal causes.	24.200	4.490	-.675	.217	1.611	.430
Attribution of failure to the teacher.	9.600	2.785	.458	.217	.885	.430
Attribution of academic failure to lack of effort.	18.168	4.136	-.884	.217	1.266	.430
Externalization and uncontrollability of academic results, mainly success.	11.520	3.688	.303	.217	-.340	.430
Attribution of failure to lack of ability.	11.032	2.558	-.588	.217	-.463	.430
Perceived performance.	21.352	5.448	.068	.217	-.383	.430
Academic self-efficacy.	25.256	4.190	-1.746	.217	4.586	.430

Source: Own elaboration. Data from descriptive analyses of variables examined.

Regarding the results of self-esteem, it was necessary to consider the intervals by category, which are as follows: **0 to 24 points Low**; **25 to 49 points Medium-Low**; **50 to 74 points Medium-High**; and **75 to 100 points High**. With respect to the above, it can be observed that there were no students in the Low range, nor in the High level. All the results concentrated in the Medium-Low and Medium-High levels. Specifically, 81 students (64.8%) were found to be in the Medium-Low level and 44 students (35.2%) in the Medium-High level. In sum, it can be noted that a significant percentage of students do not have a good general concept of their self-esteem.

Table 2

Frequency analysis of self-esteem scores by each level (n°/%).

Levels of self-esteem	Females		Males		Total per level
	Quantity	Percentage	Quantity	Percentage	
Low	0	0%	0	0%	0
Medium-Low	54	67%	27	33%	81/64,8%
Medium-High	28	63,6%	16	36,3%	44/35,2%
High	0	0%	0	0%	0
Total					125/100%

Source: Own elaboration. Data from frequency analysis of self-esteem.

3.2 Differences between gender, years of training and age of the university students with respect to the variables examined

When comparing the different variables, it can be observed that there are statistically significant differences with respect to the gender of the students in the attribution of failure to lack of ability in favor of the group of females. In this sense, it would be women who would present a more unfavorable perception of their academic abilities, showing a negative internal attribution. Differences were also evident in the "Family" dimension, again in favor of the female group, with greater family conflicts (see Table 2).

Table 3

Means (standard deviation) and comparisons of students according to gender with respect to the variables examined (t-test and effect size).

Scales	Dimensions	Females		Males		t	d
		M	SD	M	SD		
Attributional Styles	Attribution of academic success to internal causes	24.743	4.368	23.162	4.587	1.889	.124
	Attribution of failure to the teacher	9.731	2.680	9.348	2.991	.729	.000
	Attribution of academic failure to lack of effort	18.073	4.120	18.348	4.208	-.353	.000
	Externalization and uncontrollability of academic results	11.109	3.644	12.302	3.687	-1.731	.164
	Attribution of failure to lack of ability	11.609	2.360	9.930	2.585	3.656	.447**
Academic Self-Concept	Perceived performance	21.000	5.171	22.023	5.946	-.998	.099
	Academic self-efficacy	25.268	4.207	25.232	4.207	.045	.000

Source: Own elaboration. Data comparison of students according to gender.

With respect to students' years of training, statistically significant differences were only observed in academic self-efficacy, in the academic self-concept scale ($F(4,120) = 2.788, p < .05, \eta^2 = .35$). Multiple comparisons show that differences were present between the groups of first- and second-year students ($M = 24.341, SD = 4.481$, respectively, $M = 26.695, SD = 2.851$). In this context, it is observed that second-year students perceive themselves more self-efficacious in their academic activities by indicating, for example, that they are able to do assignments and homework well, even if they are difficult. In terms of age, no statistically significant differences were observed.

3.3 Relationships between scale variables and sociodemographic data

To review possible relationships between instrument variables and sociodemographic data, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used (see Table 4). The results show that there were statistically significant relationships in several of the dimensions analyzed. The most outstanding relationships were between internal causes and failure due to lack of effort ($r = .454; p < .05$); internal causes and self-efficacy ($r = .580; p < .05$); externalization and uncontrollability of results and perceived performance ($r = .399; p < .05$); perceived and personal performance ($r = .480; p < .05$). Also, significant but opposite relationships were evidenced between failure due to the teacher and failure due to

lack of effort ($r=-.249$; $p<.05$); lack of ability and gender ($r=-.313$; $p<.05$); lack of ability and age ($r=-.215$; $p<.05$); family and gender ($r=-.181$; $p<.05$); social and age ($r=-.201$; $p<.05$).

Table 4

Pearson correlations with respect to the variables examined and sociodemographic variables.

	IC	FT	FLE	EUR	LA	PP	SE	PER	FAM	SOC	GEN	AGE	YT
IC	1	.097	.454**	.097	.353**	-.059	.580**	-.015	.224*	.056	-.168	-.117	-.029
FT		1	-.249**	.166	.173	.204*	-.031	.121	.204*	.155	-.066	-.025	.085
FLE			1	.174	.131	.066	.066	.016	.054	.015	.032	-.105	-.097
EUR				1	.221*	.399**	.049	.176*	.084	.107	.154	-.136	-.053
LA					1	.243**	.110	.335**	.258**	.001	-.313**	-.215*	-.086
PP						1	-.067	.480**	.084	.170	.090	-.146	-.068
SE							1	-.164	.118	.103	-.004	-.040	.086
PER								1	.079	.178*	-.019	-.075	-.084
FAM									1	.011	-.181*	-.022	.066
SOC										1	.111	-.201*	-.097
GEN											1	.106	-.085
AGE												1	.680**
YT													1

Note: Internal causes (IC); Failure due to teacher (FT); Failure lack of effort (FLE); Externalization and uncontrollability of results (EUR); Lack of ability (LA); Perceived performance (PP); Self-efficacy (SE); Personal (PER); Family (FAM); Social (SOC); Gender (GEN); Age (AGE); Years of training (YT).

**The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own elaboration. Data Pearson correlation.

4. Discussion

Regarding the descriptive analyses of the results, it can be established that the highest rated items are related to the attributions of academic failure due to lack of effort, attribution of failure due to lack of ability and academic self-efficacy. In the words of Weiner (1979), these attributions have important implications for motivation, cognition, and emotions in students. In the case of attributions of academic failure due to lack of effort, students seem to understand that their academic performance is related to the amount of effort put in their activities, which has positive repercussions on their academic motivation (Manassero and Vasquez, 1995) and on their expectations about their academic future (Weiner, 1979). In addition, these attributions are also related to ego emotions, such as higher self-esteem (English et al., 2012). In summary,

these students seem to be in a better position to face future successes and failures, as their past experiences provide them with guidelines to develop more effective actions and strategies for their academic goals (Weiner, 1986, 2004).

However, it is alarming that some students also attribute their academic failures to lack of ability, an external causality that has been linked to decreased motivation and expectations (Haynes et al., 2008; Lagos et al., 2016; Manassero and Vasquez, 1995). When students perceive that their failure results from low ability, they are more likely to experience emotions of helplessness and demotivation, which can lead to a reduction in effort (Abramson et al., 1978; Weiner, 1985). This raises concerns about the potentially negative impact of these attributions on future academic performance.

Regarding academic self-concept, the moderate levels of academic self-efficacy observed may be attributed to previous experiences of success and failure, as suggested by Véliz et al. (2020). Academic self-efficacy has been associated with positive outcomes, such as increased self-regulation ability, higher motivation, and the use of effective learning strategies (Cárcamo et al., 2020). Therefore, increasing students' confidence in their abilities could have a positive impact on their academic performance.

Regarding self-esteem, most of the participants were in the Medium-Low levels, which coincides with previous research which has related low self-esteem to negative effects on academic performance and motivation (Akoul et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2020). Negative self-esteem has been associated with higher levels of anxiety and helplessness when facing challenging academic tasks (Naranjo, 2007). Therefore, the low self-esteem observed in these students could be affecting key variables in their learning.

Gender differences in self-esteem levels are also aligned with previous literature that indicates that women tend to experience more self-esteem problems in the family context (Harris and Orth, 2020). This can be explained by sociocultural factors related to traditional gender roles that still persist in certain families (Parra and Oliva, 2002).

The correlations found between the different variables support the theoretically expected interrelationships. For example, the association between internal attributions and academic self-efficacy is consistent with the idea that internal causal explanations can influence perceptions of competence (Manassero & Vasquez, 1995; Weiner, 1979). Similarly, the inverse relationship between external attributions of outcomes and perceived performance supports the notion that external attributions are related to lower personal commitment and motivation, which in turn negatively affects learning (Vera et al., 2021).

5. Conclusions

Students attribute their academic failure to lack of effort and lack of ability, which is related to higher motivation and self-esteem. However, external attributions, such as lack of ability, may have a negative impact on motivation. Levels of academic self-efficacy are moderate and could improve with experience. Self-esteem is mostly low, especially among females. To encourage positive internal attributions, strengthen academic self-efficacy and address low self-esteem are suggested in the light of the findings. This could contribute to better academic performance and emotional well-being of students.

As for the limitations of the study, its cross-sectional design is emphasized, since it provides an approach to the phenomenon studied, but does not consider the possible dynamic characteristics of the variables examined, which could be addressed through a longitudinal study. On the contrary, working with a non-probabilistic sample by convenience could be improved through the incorporation of a broader and more representative sample of different degrees and universities.

Finally, with respect to the projections, it would be interesting to enrich this research with qualitative methodologies and the incorporation of instructors as subjects of study in order to discuss their perception of the students, especially with regard to their attributive styles.

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