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Factors influencing good academic performance of students in highly vulnerable contexts: resilience and family bonds

Factores que inciden en el buen desempeño académico de estudiantes en contextos de alta vulnerabilidad: resiliencia y vínculo familiar

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes resilience factors and the role of family bonds in the academic performance of high school students in contexts of high social vulnerability. A qualitative multiple-case study design (n = 3 cases) was adopted, guided by the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the meanings that the actors themselves attribute to their school trajectories. Each case constituted a case-level unit of analysis composed of a student–primary caregiver dyad, for a total of six participants (N = 6), selected from schools with a School Vulnerability Index exceeding 85% and outstanding grade point averages over the last two academic years. Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews, analyzed via inductive-deductive Thematic Analysis using ATLAS.ti software. The results revealed three convergent categories within these three cases: family cohesion and communication as a discursive containment network; monitored parenting practices and clear boundaries acting as a protective filter against community risks; and the development of cognitive self-efficacy that enables the resignification of adversity as part of the learning process. It is concluded that, in the cases studied, these three mechanisms appear to operate not in isolation but as a self-reinforcing relational chain; this suggests a potential implication, to be tested in studies of broader scope, for the design of school retention policies, parental training programs, and community violence prevention initiatives.

Keywords: case study; resilience; family bond; academic performance; social vulnerability

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza los factores de resiliencia y el rol del vínculo familiar en el desempeño académico de estudiantes de secundaria en contextos de alta vulnerabilidad social. Se adoptó un diseño cualitativo de estudio de casos múltiples (n = 3 casos), orientado por el propósito de comprender en profundidad los significados que los propios actores atribuyen a su trayectoria escolar. Cada caso constituyó una unidad de análisis compuesta por una díada estudiante-cuidador principal, totalizando seis participantes (N = 6), pertenecientes a establecimientos con Índice de Vulnerabilidad Escolar superior al 85 % y con promedios de calificaciones sobresalientes durante los últimos dos años académicos. La recolección de datos se realizó mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad, analizadas a través de Análisis Temático de

orientación inductivo-deductiva con apoyo del software ATLAS.ti. Los resultados revelaron tres categorías convergentes en los tres casos: la cohesión y comunicación familiar como red discursiva de contención; las prácticas de crianza monitoreadas y la existencia de límites claros como filtro protector frente a los riesgos del entorno comunitario; y el desarrollo de una autoeficacia cognitiva que permite resignificar la adversidad como parte del proceso de aprendizaje. Se concluye que, en los casos estudiados, estos tres mecanismos no parecen operar de manera aislada, sino como una cadena relacional que se retroalimenta, lo que sugiere una implicación potencial, a contrastar en estudios de mayor alcance, para el diseño de políticas de permanencia escolar, de formación parental y de prevención de la violencia comunitaria.

Palabras clave: estudio de casos; resiliencia; vínculo familiar; rendimiento académico; vulnerabilidad social

INTRODUCTION

Understanding human development throughout the life cycle requires recognizing that no individual path is explained apart from the relational systems in which it unfolds. From the ecological perspective of human development, whose validity and applicability in educational contexts has been documented in recent reviews of bioecological theory (Tong & An, 2024), adolescent development occurs at the intersection of microsystems such as the family, school, and peer group, whose relational quality conditions the availability of adaptive resources in the face of adversity.

In contexts of high socioeconomic vulnerability, these microsystems are often stressed simultaneously. This structural pressure causes the emergence of critical points such as material precariousness, exposure to community violence, and the fragility of institutional support networks that not only threaten the psychosocial well-being of students, but can also gradually weaken their educational trajectory. Understanding how some students manage, despite these demands, to sustain outstanding academic performance is one of the most persistent questions in contemporary socio-educational research.

For much of its history, research on childhood and adolescence in adverse contexts was articulated under a deficit logic, focused on documenting risk factors and their adverse effects on mental health, learning, and social integration. Although this approach made it possible to measure the seriousness of inequalities, it tended to make invisible those who, sharing the same structural conditions, manage to consolidate favorable trajectories. The step towards a strengths paradigm arose with the longitudinal studies of Werner and Smith (1992) in the Kauai cohort, which systematically showed how a subgroup exposed to extreme poverty, perinatal vulnerability, and family dysfunction achieved healthy psychosocial development in adulthood. This milestone served as the basis for Rutter (3) to theorize protective mechanisms as dynamic processes of mediation in the face of risk, and for Masten (4) to call resilience "ordinary magic", understood as the activation of ordinary adaptive resources such as attachment or cognitive functions present in most individuals.

This view has direct implications for the educational field. From this perspective, academic resilience constitutes a fertile analytical pathway by allowing the identification of the mechanisms that enable outstanding school performance despite structural adversity (Villalta Páucar, 2010).

It is also necessary to specify resilience as a construct, given that contemporary literature agrees that it is not a static attribute or an innate quality, but a dynamic and relational process, mediated by the

socio-emotional competencies of students and the quality of their significant relationships (Cretton & Méndez, 2022). This processual perspective is operationalized in Martin & Marsh's (2006) model of academic resilience, which argues that, unlike general psychological resilience, this construct consists of the ability to sustain an ideal performance both in the face of chronic adversity and in the face of specific demands of the school environment. To this end, it involves specific dimensions such as composure in the face of stress, cognitive-emotional control, self-confidence, strategic coordination of resources, and commitment to learning. These elements show that students deploy differentiated strategies in the face of tensions of socioeconomic origin or of the educational environment itself. Along these lines, systematic reviews warn that the dynamic nature of the phenomenon requires the use of approaches sensitive to the variability of the context and the overcoming of reductionist approaches (8).

If academic resilience describes the "what" of the adaptive phenomenon, the question of the "how" inevitably refers to the family environment as its main relational scaffolding. The family thus constitutes the first protective space, capable of cushioning the risks of the environment and enhancing opportunities for learning and personal agency in the face of adversity. To theoretically structure this process, Walsh's multisystem model of family resilience (9) is especially relevant in identifying three interrelated functional domains: a) shared belief systems, which give meaning to adversity and sustain a hopeful perspective towards the future; b) organizational patterns, referring to structural flexibility, affective cohesion and access to social support networks; and c) communication processes, which encompass discursive clarity, open emotional expression and collaborative conflict resolution. The strength of the model is established in the synergy of these three domains to consolidate a resilient belief system, based on communicational dynamics that make challenges visible without overwhelming the children emotionally. Recent research that applies this model in Latin American family contexts confirms the empirical operability of its three domains outside the clinical settings in which it was originally formulated (10).

Recent empirical evidence supports the relevance of this framework in contexts of social vulnerability. Qualitative research in Chilean families indicates that communication, trust, and parental emotional support, combined with clear academic standards, are associated with greater academic resilience in children (11). Likewise, from the teaching perspective, it is recognized that functional family ties operate as a central protective factor against school failure and dropout in vulnerable populations (12). In a convergent line, international studies show that emotional cohesion and expressiveness in the home are among the main factors associated with subjective school well-being in adolescents (Kollannoor & Thomas, 2025), while the parenting literature highlights the role of warmth and communication in the development of prosocial and protective behaviors during childhood and adolescence (Gómez Tabares et al., 2023).

A second empirical axis refers specifically to parenting practices and the function of parental monitoring as a protective mechanism against the demands of the community environment. Recent research on vulnerable adolescents indicates that parenting practices, particularly emotional support and parental communication, show a close association with academic resilience, even above school variables such as classroom climate (15). Similarly, recent research with Basque adolescents confirms

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that family support affects resilience indirectly, in turn shows that both are mediated by self-concept, and that both variables jointly predict better school adaptation (16). At the international level, family social support has been linked to academic resilience through the mediation of self-regulated learning (17), while population-based studies associate parental resilience with greater mental well-being in adolescents (18). It should be noted that this relationship is not limited to the availability of economic resources, since there is longitudinal evidence that documents that parental relational factors are essential to sustain resilience and well-being in conditions of economic adversity (19), which qualifies purely economic readings of vulnerability and highlights the interpretative value of the quality of attachment.

A third conceptual axis refers to the intrapsychic plane of the student through academic self-efficacy, understood in terms of Bandura (20) as the belief in one's own ability to organize and execute the courses of action necessary to achieve certain achievements. This belief is built from four sources of relational information: a) experiences of direct achievement; b) vicarious experiences observed in significant models; c) verbal persuasion of reference figures; and d) physiological and emotional states associated with performance. In this process, the family not only provides affective support, but also acts as an active source of verbal persuasion and modeling. Recent evidence links perseverance and academic resilience with coping with adverse and uncertain contexts (21), and positive associations between psychological well-being and academic self-efficacy in diverse student populations (Chumbimuni-Aguirre & Pequeña Constantino, 2022) have also been observed.

In higher education, it has been observed that academic resilience interacts with perceived support to promote academic achievement (24) and that academic engagement acts as a mediating element in this process (Nigussie Worku & Urgessa Gita, 2024), suggesting that these relational mechanisms could be projected as hypotheses of inquiry in later educational trajectories.

Although there is consensus on the role of school climate and teaching strategies in promoting resilience (26), the literature on inclusion emphasizes that these processes are closely articulated with school practices that facilitate or hinder overcoming adversity (27). The literature reviewed is predominantly quantitative and correlational, aimed at establishing statistical associations between predefined variables. Without ignoring the value of this nomothetic approach, it should be noted that it provides limited evidence on the idiographic processes, narratives, and logics of meaning through which these mechanisms are configured in the daily lives of specific families and students. This research positions itself in this gap, proposing to qualitatively understand the configuration of family protective factors and their link with academic performance in specific cases of high social vulnerability.

Based on the above, the general objective of this research was to qualitatively understand how the dynamics of the family bond and the resilience processes associated with outstanding academic performance are configured in secondary school students who study in environments of high social vulnerability.

To achieve this objective, the research addresses the following general question: how are the dynamics of the family bond configured and what resilience factors are associated with outstanding

academic performance in secondary school students exposed to environments of high social vulnerability? From this question, three specific questions emerge that guide the analysis: a) what dynamics of family cohesion and communication are present in the cases studied?; b) what practices of upbringing and setting limits operate as protective mechanisms against risky behaviors in the environment?; and c) what processes of self-efficacy and cognitive resignification do students display in the face of adversity?

METHOD

Paradigm and design

This research is developed within the framework of the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, according to which social reality is understood as an intersubjective construction, accessible through the dense interpretation of the discourses and practices of the actors themselves (Stake, 1995). In coherence with this epistemological positioning, a qualitative approach was used with a multiple-case study design ($n = 3$), relevant to examine contemporary phenomena in their real context and to delve into the subjective meanings that people attribute to their experience (Villalta Páucar, 2010).

The choice of a multiple-case design responds to the logic of theoretical replication described by Yin (28), according to which each case is approached as an independent unit of analysis whose function is not statistical representativeness, but rather the contrast and analytical nuance of theoretical propositions based on the systematic comparison between units. This approach allows for the establishment of convergent patterns between family contexts with diverse structures and dynamics, which gives greater interpretative solidity to the findings than that obtained through a single case. Likewise, this methodological option meets the recommendation to complement the predominant quantitative approaches in the study of academic resilience with qualitative approaches capable of capturing the processual and situated dimension of the construct (8).

Participants

The sample was non-probabilistic and intentional, selected by criteria. Its size was determined under the principle of informational power (29), which states that the more specific and relevant the information that each unit contributes to the study objective, the smaller the number of cases required to achieve an analytically sound understanding.

Within the framework of this design, a distinction is made between case, unit of analysis and participant. Three cases were formed (Case A, Case B and Case C). Each case constitutes a unit of analysis made up of a participant dyad composed of a student and his or her main caregiver, which totals six participants ($N = 6$). The dyad, and not the student in isolation, was defined as the unit of analysis because the configuration of the family bond as a protective factor is a relational phenomenon. Likewise, the inclusion of the main caregiver allowed the perspective of the student body to be triangulated with that of their immediate family environment.

The inclusion criteria for the students were:

- Be between 14 and 17 years old at the time of data collection;

- Belong to an educational establishment with a School Vulnerability Index (IVE) greater than 85%
- Present an outstanding Overall Grade Point Average (PGA) (PGA > 6.0 on a scale of 1.0 to 7.0) during the last two academic years.

This last criterion operationalizes the notion of positive deviant case, used in qualitative research to designate units that, sharing the conditions of vulnerability of a reference group, exhibit exceptionally favorable results not explained by these structural conditions (Villalta Páucar, 2010); this approach has recently been applied in school contexts of high adversity to identify local practices associated with better results despite similar structural conditions (30).

The establishments of origin correspond to three municipal high schools, located in the Metropolitan Region. The IVE, prepared by the National Board of School Aid and Scholarships (JUNAEB) of Chile, estimates the level of socioeconomic risk of enrollment based on variables such as family income, parental schooling and access to health services. Establishments with an abortion above 80% are classified in the high vulnerability bracket; in this research, the three centers exceeded 85%, placing them in the upper bracket of this category.

The cases were coded as Case A, Case B, and Case C to protect the identity of the participants through pseudonymization. The cases present variations in their family structure, including a maternal single-parent headship in Case B, which enriches the analytical comparison without compromising the convergence of the findings. The detailed characterization of the participants is presented in Table 2 (Results section).

Instruments

Two in-depth semi-structured interview scripts were designed and implemented, one addressed to the student and the other to his or her primary caregiver. Each script comprised nine open-ended questions, organized around the thematic axes summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Dimensions explored in semi-structured interview scripts

Participant	Dimensions explored
Student	a) Perception of adversity and risks in the environment.
	b) Self-efficacy and academic coping strategies.
	c) Motivation and school life project.
	d) Receipt of family support received.
Primary caregiver	a) Parenting practices and setting limits.
	b) Family cohesion and communication.
	c) Management of crisis situations and economic adversity.

Note. Own elaboration (2026).

The script for students included, among other questions, such as "What do you do when something is difficult for you at school?" and "How would you describe the support you receive from your family?" In the case of caregivers, aspects such as "What rules or agreements exist at home regarding studies?" were addressed. Both instruments were submitted to the judgment of three experts in educational psychology, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and sufficiency of the items through a guideline. Based on their recommendations, the syntax and semantic order of the questions were adjusted, and new in-depth questions were incorporated to address the nuclei of greater analytical density, such as the specification of coping mechanisms in the face of academic stress.

Procedure

The fieldwork was carried out between March and June 2026. After obtaining the informed consent of the caregivers and the informed consent of the students, two interview sessions were held per case, each lasting 60 minutes, in a private space within the school establishment that guaranteed conditions of comfort and confidentiality. Students and caregivers were interviewed independently to safeguard the spontaneity of their stories and avoid biases of social desirability or conditioning among the members of the dyad. The sessions were recorded in audio format with express authorization and transcribed verbatim, including paralinguistic marks of pauses, emphasis and silences, significant for the discursive analysis.

Data analysis

The analysis was carried out using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following its six phases:

- Familiarization with the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts.
- Generation of initial codes applied segment by segment.
- Search for topics by grouping codes into patterns of meaning with a higher level of abstraction.
- Review of emerging topics, contrasting them with the codified excerpts and the entire corpus.
- Definition and naming of final categories.
- Preparation of the analytical report integrating illustrative extracts.

The technical data processing was assisted with the ATLAS.ti software. The analytical sequence adopted an inductive-deductive procedure. In the first phase, open codes were generated inductively, strictly adhering to the semantic content of the stories, without using the conceptual frameworks of Walsh (9) or Bandura (20) as a priori coding templates. In a second phase, once the emerging themes were consolidated, they were reflexively contrasted with the theoretical categories to give them greater conceptual density, ensuring that the theoretical nomenclature did not distort the original meanings of the participants. A hybrid coding procedure whose application criteria follow the updated guidelines of the reflexive approach to thematic analysis (32). The divergences between the inductive reading and the previous categories were resolved through the iterative rereading of the empirical material.

Rigor and credibility

Following the quality criteria for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), four dimensions were safeguarded:

- Credibility: guaranteed through the triangulation of sources (student and caregiver in each case) and the prolongation of fieldwork through multiple interview sessions.
- Transferability: favored by the dense description of the selection criteria and the socio-educational context of the cases, which allows other researchers to assess the applicability of the findings in analogous environments.
- Dependency: safeguarded by a documented audit trail and strict systematization of the coding process.
- Confirmability: achieved through epistemological vigilance over the starting frames, to avoid theoretical overdetermination of the data, and through the positionality exercise detailed below.

Positionality and reflexivity

It is recognized that the researcher's professional career in the field of educational leadership and social justice influenced her interpretive sensitivity, orienting her preferentially towards a reading based on strengths and protective factors rather than deficits. This position was not assumed as a bias to be neutralized, but as an element of reflexivity made explicit in a transparent manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To balance this position, a continuous process of empirical testing was implemented, iteratively reviewing the emerging codes along with the textual extracts to ensure that the initial theoretical categories ((9); (20)) did not condition the interpretation of the data.

RESULTS

Case Overview

Before presenting the cross-cutting thematic categories, it is pertinent to offer a brief descriptive characterization of each case, in coherence with the logic of presentation "within the case" before the "inter-case" synthesis recommended for multiple case study designs (28). This characterization, of a strictly descriptive nature, is presented in Table 2; its analytical interpretation is developed in the text that follows the table.

Table 2

Descriptive characterization of the cases

Case	Family Type	Household Composition
A	Biparental nuclear	Both caregivers participate in school accompaniment. The student describes shared reading and daily conversation as habitual family practices.

Case	Family Type	Household Composition
B	Single-parent with maternal headship	Absence of a second parental figure in the home. Presence of an extended support network (maternal grandmother). The student lives with his mother and stepfather; this parental figure was
C	Biparental reconstituida	incorporated into the family nucleus at a later point in the student's career.

Note. Own elaboration (2026).

Table 2 shows that each case represents a different family configuration. In Case C, both the student and the caregiver describe the incorporation of the stepfather as a gradual process of building trust; in the reports analyzed, this process is discursively associated with a strengthening and not a weakening of the perceived cohesion of the family nucleus, although this is an interpretative reading of the researchers themselves and not a direct observational data. This diversity of configurations, far from introducing interpretative noise, allowed us to test the robustness of the identified central pattern and to highlight the importance of the quality of the bond over the structural form of the families.

Converging thematic categories and qualitative evidence

It was possible to determine a convergence in the presence of the three mechanisms analyzed. Although Case B responds to a single-parent structure and Case C to a reconstituted one, in the three units the relational dynamics operated under the principle of qualitative theoretical replication (28) where the consistency of affects, clarity in limits and perceived support constituted the common substrate for outstanding academic performance.

The thematic analysis allowed us to identify three central categories shared by the three cases. To support the empirical validity of the analysis, representative textual citations are provided identified by case and role of the participant.

- Family cohesion and communication as a discursive network of containment

In all three cases, a dynamic of open communication and affective containment emerged as a common element. Caregivers reported a deliberate strategy of making economic or social difficulties visible without transferring the emotional burden of anguish to the student.

This discursive moderation of information about adversity, that is, talking about it without emotionally saturating the adolescent, can be read, in terms of Walsh's model (9), as a combined exercise of the domains of shared beliefs and communicational processes, in which the family collectively constructs a narrative that recognizes the difficulty without installing it as a threat to the

continuity of the educational project, on the contrary generating a climate of security that allows the student to concentrate on his or her school goals.

"My mom always tells me things clearly, we know when things are tight with money, but she tells me: 'Don't worry, your only job is to study and get ahead, I'll take care of the rest.' That gives me enormous peace to study."

(Student, Case A)

"We do not hide the problems from him, but we present them as challenges at home. We explain to him that by working together we get out of debt, but without burdening him. School is his priority."

(Caregiver, Case C)

Case B introduces a relevant structural variation, as it is a single-parent family headed by a mother in which schooling is discursively validated as "the only inheritance", transforming family expectations into a central motivational engine for the student.

"I will not be able to leave her houses or money, because I do not have them. I tell my daughter that the only real inheritance I can leave her is her education, and she has understood it as her greatest treasure."

(Caregiver, Case B)

This finding suggests that, in the cases analyzed, family cohesion did not depend on a normative two-parent structure, but on relational quality and the shared sense around the value of education, regardless of the composition of the household.

- Monitored parenting practices and clear boundaries as a protective filter

The testimonies reveal a safe and structured family environment, characterized by the active supervision of parents in the academic and social spheres. This presence is not perceived as an authoritarian or restrictive imposition, but is interpreted by the students as an act of care and affective protection against the risks of the community environment (delinquency, dropout or drug addiction).

"My uncles or neighbors sometimes say that my mom is exaggerated because she doesn't let me stay late on the street, but I know why she does it. The neighborhood is dangerous and she takes care of my future. That she sets limits on me shows me that she cares about me."

(Student, Case B)

"There are rules here: you arrive at such a time, the cell phone is turned off at ten and the homework is checked before dinner. It's not to bother, it's because if there is no order in the house, the street swallows them."

(Caregiver, Case A)

The students' perception suggests that the protective effectiveness of parental monitoring does not lie primarily in its intensity, but in the quality of the affective bond in which it is inscribed; a decisive nuance that the literature focused exclusively on control variables tends to underestimate.

- Development of cognitive self-efficacy and resignification of error

At the individual level, students manifest a solid self-efficacy to face academic demands, supported by a high tolerance to frustration and a remarkable ability to resignify negative events. A revealing aspect is that they do not interpret mistakes or low grades as personal failures or insurmountable barriers, but as learning opportunities, a process significantly driven by the verbal persuasion of their caregivers. In this way, the secure base provided by the family favors them to take on complex pedagogical challenges with self-confidence. In their discourses, school success ceases to appear as an external obligation to become a mechanism of personal agency aimed at transforming their own life cycle.

"When I get a bad grade, I don't sink. My stepfather helps me review where I went wrong and tells me that a stumble doesn't define who I am. That gives me the strength to try again and study twice as hard."

(Student, Case C)

"I always repeat: 'You are capable, you have the necessary head and the effort that is needed.' If one day he gets a low grade, we sit down, talk about it and look for a way to come back. Perseverance will serve him for life."

(Caregiver, Case C)

In terms of Bandura's model (20), this discursive pattern can be read as the sedimentation of self-efficacy beliefs constructed, in the cases analyzed, through the repeated verbal persuasion of caregivers, expressed through phrases of validation and positive expectation, as well as through the observation of their own parental perseverance in the face of economic adversity.

Synthesis of the cross-analysis of cases

The cross-analysis of the cases shows a pattern of convergence in the quality of the family bond characterized by cohesion, open communication and emotional support that transcends the structural differences of the households (two-parent in A and C; single-parent in B) and the particularities of their trajectories. This coincidence, articulated through singular discursive paths, responds to the logic of theoretical replication of the methodological design, based on the independent analysis and subsequent contrast of the units. Thus, convergent empirical evidence is provided in favor of the proposition that it is relational quality, and not the mere formal configuration of the family, that is the central mechanism that catalyzes outstanding academic performance in contexts of high vulnerability. However, in the absence of cases of low performance for a contrasting comparison, the design does not allow to ascribe to this factor an exclusive or determining explanatory character.

DISCUSSION

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The qualitative findings of this research converge with the literature that places individual resilience as a key catalyst for educational achievement in contexts of high exclusion (Villalta Paucar, 2010). The in-depth examination of the cases reveals that outstanding academic performance does not respond to the absence of structural stressors, but to the deployment of a primary protective environment capable of cushioning the adversities of the community context. This result coincides with recent studies that identify parenting practices as one of the most consistent predictors of academic resilience in vulnerable adolescents ((15); (34)). Along the same lines, Minango (35) argues that the strengthening of socio-emotional skills in the educational environment constitutes a central strategy for the development of student resilience, which reinforces the reading that the protective family environment identified in the cases analyzed does not operate in isolation, but in articulation with emotional competencies that the student himself displays in the face of adversity.

On the theoretical level, the evidence supports the interpretative utility of Walsh's multisystem model of family resilience (9) for the analysis of socio-educational vulnerability in Latin America. Its three core dimensions: belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication processes emerged clearly in the narratives analyzed, in line with qualitative research that applies this framework to other forms of adversity in the region (10). Likewise, the results dialogue with the dimensions of composure, control, trust, coordination, and commitment proposed by Martin and Marsh (2006) in their model of academic resilience. However, as it is an exploratory study of three cases, the formal extension of these explanatory frameworks to this specific context constitutes a working hypothesis that requires empirical contrast in samples of greater breadth and diversity.

On the other hand, the international literature warns that the relationship between resilience and academic trajectory is exposed to continuous tensions. In populations under high demand, such as university students, the scarcity of social support precipitates academic burnout, while a solid family support operates as a protective factor against burnout ((36); (37)). Convergently, Alves et al. (2024) found that self-efficacy beliefs have a direct impact on the well-being and health of university students in contexts of high demand, suggesting that the protective mechanisms identified in this study, particularly the trust and affective security transmitted by the family environment, could constitute a basis on which this perceived self-efficacy is sustained in later educational stages. Along these lines, the data suggest that the identified protective mechanisms (cohesion, communication, and affective support) could be projected as a critical support towards higher education, a stage in which demands increase and daily containment tends to be diluted. As Cengiz et al. (2025) highlight, resilience and hope act as mediators between burnout and well-being, reinforcing the need to intervene simultaneously in family and school climates.

Regarding violence prevention, although the research did not directly measure criminal or risky behaviors, the narratives suggest that the development of self-efficacy and assertive conflict resolution in the home strengthens shielding against the environment. This is in line with experimental evidence that links training in socio-emotional skills with the reduction of violence and the improvement of the school climate (39). In line with this, Sanmartín Ureña and Tapia Peralta (2023) emphasize that emotional education is essential for the comprehensive education of students, insofar as it provides tools for self-knowledge, affective regulation, and assertive coexistence,

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elements that in the cases studied are primarily modeled within the family nucleus before being projected into the school environment. This reading, however, is proposed as a horizon of future inquiry and not as a conclusive finding of the present research.

Finally, in the field of public policies, these findings offer guiding inputs for the design of socio-educational interventions, structured in three priority lines:

- Parental strengthening programs: Design devices focused on the communicational and affective dimension of the family bond, incorporating the domains of Walsh's model (9).
- Reorientation of school retention: Integrate family accompaniment into academic permanence programs, overcoming the focus exclusively on the student.
- Teacher and management training: Train school teams in the identification of protective family environments, deconstructing the bias that automatically equates socioeconomic vulnerability with family dysfunction. Added to this is the need, pointed out by Minango (35) and by Sanmartín Ureña and Tapia Peralta (2023), to incorporate emotional education in a transversal way in teacher training plans, so that school teams have tools to identify and enhance the socio-emotional skills of students in articulation with their family environment.

CONCLUSIONS

In response to the research questions, the findings show that, in the cases analyzed, family cohesion and communication, parental monitoring with clear limits, and the student's cognitive self-efficacy operate as a network of key protective mechanisms in the emergence of outstanding academic trajectories in contexts of high structural adversity. The central contribution of this study lies in showing that the explanatory capacity of school performance does not lie in the morphology or formal architecture of the family by verifying convergent patterns in both two-parent and single-parent structures, but in the quality of their bonding processes and the affective density of their daily interactions.

This result provides an interpretative reading that questions, in the cases studied, deterministic perspectives that equate socioeconomic vulnerability with intra-family dysfunction or the inability to accompany successful educational processes. Recognizing that households with scarce material resources can deploy highly functional relational systems provides principals and teachers with a renewed interpretative framework to reconfigure their alliances with the school community.

Scientific Projection and Transfer

The analytical richness achieved offers a clear methodological transfer value for analogous socio-educational realities in Latin America. In view of the marked heterogeneity in the measurement of resilience (8), this research lays the conceptual foundations for projecting three priority lines of future inquiry:

- Mixed designs and triangulation: Replicate this qualitative framework through mixed approaches that combine analytical depth with validated scales of resilience and family

support such as those derived from Martin and Marsh (2006), and integrate the teaching perspective as an additional source of validation.

- Comparative and inter-case studies: To expand the sample to contrast groups with trajectories of low performance in conditions of equal social vulnerability, allowing to isolate more accurately the critical variables of school success.
- Longitudinal follow-up: Develop cohort studies that evaluate the temporal stability of these protective mechanisms throughout the school itinerary and their subsequent impact on access to and permanence in higher education.

Methodological Considerations and Limitations

Without detracting from the explanatory force of the findings, the scope of this research must be weighed in light of the constraints of its design:

- Scope and representativeness: The qualitative nature and sample size respond to the principle of informative power (29) and not to statistical representativeness (27), which prevents exploring the influence of additional sociodemographic variables such as gender, parental educational level or rurality.
- Selection bias: The exclusive delimitation to successful cases did not contemplate a contrasting group of low performers, so it is not possible to determine if the family dynamics identified are exclusive to resilient trajectories or if they also operate in other school profiles.
- Social desirability: The direct approach to parental practices, limits and affectivity exposes narratives to the risk of presenting an idealized image of intra-family functioning.
- Temporality and causality: The cross-sectional design makes it impossible to establish causal directionality; that is, to determine if the patterns of family cohesion temporarily precede academic performance or if both phenomena feed back each other bidirectionally.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research was adjusted to the ethical safeguards of confidentiality, voluntariness, and protection of participants in conditions of social vulnerability. The written informed consent of the main caregivers and the informed assent of the students were obtained, guaranteeing the right to withdraw their participation at any stage of the process without repercussions on their school situation. All information was anonymized from the transcription process by replacing names with alphanumeric codes. Access to the recordings and transcripts was restricted exclusively to the researcher through encrypted files stored on secure servers.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USAGE STATEMENT

The author declares that the Claude generative artificial intelligence tool was used exclusively for the linguistic editing of the manuscript. The tool did not contribute to the conception of the study, the design of the research, the collection of data, the statistical or qualitative analysis, the interpretation of the findings, or the formulation of the conclusions. The author assumes full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, completeness, and scientific validity of the content presented in this manuscript.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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