




Perceived social support and academic performance in Peruvian high school students: influence of academic engagement and academic self-efficacy

 **Sergio Dominguez-Lara**¹
Universidad de San Martín de Porres (Perú)

 **Sabina N. Valente**
CARE - Research Center on Health and Social Sciences, Polytechnic Institute of Portalegre (Portugal)

 **Abílio A. Lourenço**
Universidade do Minho (Portugal)

 **Benigno Peceros-Pinto**
Universidad de San Martín de Porres (Perú)

 **Maite Díaz-Peñaloza**
Universidad Científica del Sur (Perú)

 **Segundo R. León**
Universidad Privada San Juan Bautista (Perú)

Abstract

Based on ecological systems theory, three main social contexts are associated with school engagement. In this sense, this study aimed to find out the impact of perceived social support on academic achievement considering the mediating role of academic engagement and academic self-efficacy. A total of 623 Peruvian secondary school students (women = 51.364%) and adolescents between 12 and 17 years old ($M_{age} = 14.255$; $SD_{age} = 1.454$) participated. Were evaluated with the *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support*, the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Student*, the *Academic Situations Specific Perceived Self-efficacy*, and the academic performance obtained from the institutional data. The data analysis was carried out under structural regression analysis with the weighted least square mean and variance adjusted and the parameters were interpreted under an effect size perspective. Regarding the results, the perceived social support from parent's influences on academic self-efficacy and academic engagement; at the same time, academic self-efficacy influences academic engagement and academic performance. On the other hand, when the mediating role of academic self-efficacy and academic engagement were considered, only an indirect and significant influence of perceived social support from parents on academic performance was found. In conclusion, the family is a relevant factor to increase self-efficacy beliefs and optimize academic performance.

Keywords: academic performance; perceived social support; academic self-efficacy; academic engagement; high school.

¹ Corresponding author: sdominguezmpcs@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic hurt learning levels due to the low quality of distance education (García-Castro et al., 2022), with observed limitations in the teaching and learning strategies employed (Anaya, 2021). There was a lack of effective resources to mediate conflicts in the school environment (Albor-Chadid, 2022), resulting in lost learning opportunities, an increased risk of school dropout (Arellano-Esparza & Ortiz-Espinoza, 2022), and socio-economic inequalities arising from this situation (Cabrera et al., 2020; Valente, 2020). Additionally, the pandemic affected the psychosocial health and well-being of children and adolescents, two of the most vulnerable groups. It was associated with an increase in psychosocial factors, such as the loss of healthy habits, intra-family violence, and the abuse of new technologies (Sánchez, 2021), including disruptions to sleep patterns, overweight issues, and addictions (Orgilés et al., 2020). The uncertainty generated by the changes resulting from the pandemic could have affected students' perceptions of their school environment, family dynamics, beliefs about their abilities, and engagement with school, negatively impacting academic performance. The association between these aspects is developed below.

1.1. Importance of family and friends' social support in the school stage

From the perspective of ecological systems theory, three main social contexts are associated with school engagement: family, peers, and school (Sinclair et al., 2003). Having individuals to trust, with whom to express emotions, difficulties, and opinions significantly impacts school adaptation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009), making social support (SS) relevant.

SS refers to the set of instrumental or expressive provisions, perceived or real, offered by the community, social networks, and intimate friends in crisis situations and daily life (Lin, 1986). This is especially crucial during adolescence, characterized by changes where individuals are exposed to family, social, and academic circumstances that could lead to health problems (Navarro-Loli et al., 2019).

In this sense, the family is a vital emotional axis for the full development of individuals, with parents and other family members playing a crucial role in adolescents' academic outcomes and adaptation to school (Simpkins et al., 2019; Veiga et al., 2015). During the pandemic, positive bonds between parents and children strengthened, positively impacting adolescents' mental health (Jones et al., 2021).

Furthermore, friends at school become increasingly important as young people enter adolescence (Smetana et al., 2015), a trend enhanced by the constant use of social networks (Guadarrama-Cárdenas & Mendoza-Ruiz, 2022). Therefore, the peer group could become the most influential socializing context during adolescence. Although the perception of family support decreases during this stage (Bokhorst et al., 2010), it continues to exert a strong influence, collectively impacting beliefs about adolescent engagement and academic competencies.

1.2. Influence of social support (family and friends) on academic engagement in adolescents.

Academic engagement (AE) refers to a positive mental state and satisfaction with studies and is configured around the dimensions of dedication, which involves enthusiasm and joy in the face of academic challenges, vigor linked to high levels of energy, and absorption, or the degree of concentration or immersion in activities (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). In other words, it relates to the extent to which students engage with their learning and actively participate in their academic activities and achievements (Usán-Supervía et al., 2018).

Academic engagement is a vital factor in social-personal development and academic success and is influenced by contextual aspects such as family or peers (Ansong et al., 2017; Miranda-Zapata et al., 2018; Miranda-Zapata et al., 2021; Winter et al., 2020).

Regarding the family, the support provided by parents strengthens the bond with schools, fostering a climate of warmth and encouraging decision-making (Pan et al., 2017; Sağkal & Sönmez, 2021), and holds more significance than peer support (Ansong et al., 2017).

However, it is also possible to observe the limited involvement of parents in accompanying and reviewing school tasks (Beltrán, 2013), which may increase in poverty contexts (Sucari et al., 2019).

On the other hand, emotional support provided by peers is also important for school participation, as adolescents with positive interactions with them are more engaged both behaviorally and emotionally in school (Steenberghs et al., 2021; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

1.3. Influence of social support (family and friends) on academic self-efficacy in adolescents

Academic self-efficacy (ASE) is a set of judgments that students form about their abilities to plan and make decisions to achieve expected performance through the self-regulation of their attitudes during this process (García-Méndez & Rivera-Ledesma, 2021).

In this sense, contexts close to the student promote their engagement in school, where parents, teachers, and peers provide suggestions and feedback on what they should think and how they should behave in social situations, with these praises being fundamental for the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Skaalvik et al., 2015). Furthermore, when parents encourage their children more and demonstrate higher educational expectations, adolescents have greater confidence in their abilities and improve their academic performance (Izar de la Fuente et al., 2019; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017; Konaş & Özcan, 2022).

Regarding peers, interactions among students positively contribute to their academic performance because, through forming friendships, they learn to work as a team and resolve conflicts, as well as provide support, resources, and information (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017). Thus, peers play a crucial role in students' lives during basic education, influencing adjustment and academic performance due to adolescents' tendency to choose friends with similar levels of performance and engagement, subsequently conveying a similar achievement expectation that influences academic performance (Izar de la Fuente et al., 2019).

1.4. Influence of academic self-efficacy on academic engagement

There is evidence that academic self-efficacy increases academic engagement (Sağkal & Sönmez, 2021; Usán-Supervía et al., 2018) because if the student is convinced, they will successfully complete the task, they will be more involved in it (Dogan, 2015), especially if they have previously succeeded in similar tasks. Conversely, a student with low confidence in their potential task success will not invest time or energy in it (Dogan, 2015). In the recent context of the pandemic, academic self-efficacy played a key role in addressing its consequences, particularly in adapting traditional face-to-face teaching to new modalities such as remote or virtual and hybrid environments.

1.5. Influence of academic engagement on academic performance

When it comes to predicting academic success and gaining a broader understanding of the factors involved, academic engagement emerges as a relevant construct within the growing number of social spaces where reciprocal relationships and bidirectional practices of trust, support, growth, and loyalty are established (Olivier et al., 2021). Furthermore, academic engagement is relevant because it brings together the intrinsic and extrinsic elements essential for the student to take responsibility and engage in their academic process to achieve mastery, connect with the educational institution, and find a purpose associated with their life project (Sarmiento-Martínez, et al., 2022).

Therefore, considering that academic performance is contingent on the success of the teaching-learning process, it is essential to understand the factors that predict it, and academic engagement is one of them (Liu & Flick, 2019; Miranda-Zapata et al., 2018; Miranda-Zapata et al., 2021). This indicates that less initiative to participate in activities will impact learning and performance (Li et al., 2020).

1.6. Influence of academic self-efficacy on academic performance

Self-efficacy is one of the most important factors for achieving favorable academic outcomes (Bandura, 1997) and significantly predicts academic performance (Usán-Supervía & Quílez-Robres, 2021). This is possible because students with high academic self-efficacy may perceive tasks as challenges and approach them with their knowledge and skills with a more positive attitude, increasing motivation for self-regulated task performance. This would unfold the necessary actions to achieve learning goals, guiding them toward more active behavior and a higher likelihood of attaining the desired academic performance (Güngör, 2020).

Therefore, changes in interest and perceived task difficulty may affect beliefs in academic self-efficacy and, subsequently, student performance (Nuutila et al., 2021). Additionally, academic performance and academic self-efficacy mutually influence each other over time (Ribeiro, et al., 2022; Talsma et al., 2018), making their joint consideration important.

1.7. Influence of social support on academic performance in schoolchildren

Students perform better academically when they perceive support from their environment (Alarcón-Lucuy & Coca-Lopez, 2022; Martínez et al., 2020; Vasiliki, 2022). Thus, this family and peer support allows students to better navigate the challenges presented in the school environment, as it is considered a resource they can rely on, especially in facing increased stress levels (Estrada & Mamani, 2020; Rodríguez, 2017). It is noteworthy that family support has a greater influence than peer support (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2018), as the family expresses higher achievement expectations. However, it is essential to emphasize that the influence of parental involvement in their children's education is influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and educational aspects of the family context. If a family considers their children's education important from their perspective but lacks the necessary conditions to promote learning, it will pose an obstacle to achieving educational goals (Espitia-Carrascal & Montes-Rotela, 2021).

Peers have a significant influence on academic engagement and success (Buhs et al., 2006). Furthermore, this relationship is even more intense when mediated by academic self-efficacy (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008) and academic engagement (Tomás et al., 2016).

On one hand, by increasing self-efficacy beliefs, the students will be convinced they will achieve good results through their efforts and will engage more actively in tasks (Juvonen et al., 2017), enhancing their learning (Pan et al., 2017). On the other hand, academic engagement serves as a mediator, enhancing the effects of the student's personal, social, and school context on academic achievement and satisfaction with school (Tomás et al., 2016). Conversely, the absence of support will distance the student from the curriculum, halting learning, creating dissatisfaction, and fostering beliefs of incompetence that increase the likelihood of dropping out of school (Pan et al., 2017).

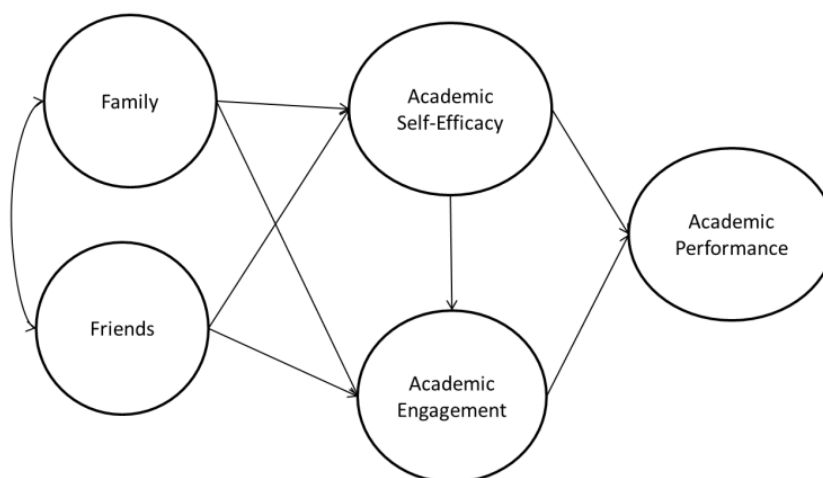


Figure 1. Explanatory model of academic performance. Note: For simplicity, chart items have been removed. Source: Own elaboration.

1.8. The present study

Academic performance is a current concern due to its relationship with the increasing academic offerings and the high number of students enrolled in private educational institutions (Grasso, 2020). As the number of students in private basic education institutions increases, it becomes less likely to monitor the learning of all students, making it challenging to detect cases that require specialized attention. Various psychosocial factors affect student performance, and these factors should be considered when assessing academic quality in adolescents before they enter higher education (García-Martín & Cantón-Mayo, 2019). There is evidence that performance in basic education predicts performance in university education (Tapasco-Alzate et al., 2021), leading institutions to do their best to optimize learning conditions.

It is known that the major determinants of student academic performance are their perception of self-efficacy and engagement, both of which are also influenced by the social support (AS) from family and

peers/friends. This creates overlapping spheres of influence between school, family, and community working together to guide and support student learning and academic development. Additionally, academic self-efficacy is directly related to self-regulation processes, as in a highly distracting environment, it becomes increasingly difficult for students to be successful, resulting in lower academic performance. This poses a significant social problem that will impact the quality of young professionals in the future.

In this context, the objective of this study is to understand the impact of perceived social support on academic performance in schooled adolescents, considering the mediating role of academic engagement and self-efficacy. The research hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1: Family and friends' social support directly and positively influence academic engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Family and friends' social support directly and positively influence academic self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3: Academic self-efficacy directly and positively influences academic engagement.

Hypothesis 4: Academic engagement directly and positively influences academic performance.

Hypothesis 5: Academic self-efficacy directly and positively influences academic performance.

Hypothesis 6: Family and friends' social support, considering the mediating role of academic engagement and academic self-efficacy, indirectly and positively influence academic performance.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

The study is situated within an explanatory design (Ato et al., 2013), focused on analyzing an explanatory model using structural equation modeling.

2.2. Participants

A total of 623 adolescents participated in the study, with 51.364% being female, ranging in age from 12 to 17 years (Mean = 14.255; $SD_{age} = 1.454$). Of the participants, 61.637% lived with both parents, 18.459% with only the mother, 2.408% with only the father, and the remaining students had other family configurations. All participants were enrolled in grades one through five of secondary education and came from four jointly managed private schools (State and Church) located in the Constitutional Province of Callao (central coast of Peru). These schools predominantly cater to students from a medium-low socioeconomic background.

2.3. Instruments

The *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) was employed in its validated version for Peruvian adolescents (Navarro-Loli et al., 2019). Originally assessing three dimensions of social support (family, friends, and significant others), it consists of 12 items scaled in Likert format with seven response alternatives (ranging from *strongly disagree* [1] to *strongly agree* [7]). For this study, only the first two dimensions were considered, showing a good fit (CFI = .994; RMSEA [90% CI] = .075 [.059, .091]; WRMR = 0.762), and high reliability for perceived family support ($\alpha = .873$) and friend support ($\alpha = .922$).

The six-item version of the *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Student* (Schaufeli et al., 2002), validated in Peruvian school students (UWES-6S; Dominguez-Lara et al., 2022), was used. This version is based on the original nine-item scale (UWES-9S; Schaufeli et al., 2006). The UWES-6S assesses work engagement unidimensionally with six items and seven response options (from *Never* [0] to *Always* [6]). In this study, the UWES-6S demonstrated an acceptable fit (CFI = .983; RMSEA [90% CI] = .149 [.127, .172]; WRMR = 0.987) and high score reliability ($\alpha = .898$).

The version tailored for Peruvian adolescents (Navarro-Loli & Dominguez-Lara, 2019) of the *Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale in Academic Situations* (EAPESA; Palenzuela, 1983) was utilized. The EAPESA assesses academic self-efficacy unidimensionally with seven items and four response options (from *Never* [1] to *Always* [4]). The fit with the data in this study was adequate (CFI = .993; RMSEA [90% CI] = .075 [.056, .094]; WRMR = 0.791), and the score reliability was high ($\alpha = .897$).

Finally, to assess academic performance, the institution's grade records in three subjects—science and technology, mathematics, and communication—were taken into account. For analytical purposes, academic performance was treated as a latent variable. In the current study, the score reliability was deemed acceptable ($\alpha = .770$).

2.4. Procedure

This report is the result of a research project approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the Universidad Privada San Juan Bautista (Registration No. 063-2021-CIEI-UPSJB). Additionally, it was conducted by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Code of Ethics of the Colegio de Psicólogos del Perú (2018).

Subsequently, contact was made with the participating educational institutions, and parents were approached to obtain authorization for the assessment of students through an informed consent form created on Google Forms. The consent form outlined the research objectives, the confidential treatment of data, and the potential use of the results. The inclusion criterion for the study was adolescents in grades one to five of secondary education from private schools. The evaluation took place during classes, and only those adolescents who agreed after the objectives of the study were explained participated. The assessment was conducted using a *Google Form*.

2.5. Data Analysis

Regarding the analytical section, structural regression (Figure 1) was employed for testing the research hypotheses. The Weighted Least Squares Mean and Variance Adjusted (WLSMV) estimation method was used. Model fit was assessed using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ($> .90$; McDonald & Ho, 2002) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ($< .08$; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The analysis was conducted using Mplus version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998 - 2015).

After evaluating the individual fit of the instruments and an oblique model illustrating the association between variables, relationships between predictor and criterion variables were modeled according to the proposed model (Figure 1). Direct and indirect effects were analyzed from an effect size perspective. Concerning direct effects between constructs, effects were categorized as low if less than .30, moderate between .30 and .50, and high if greater than .50 (Miranda-Zapata et al., 2018). The explained variance of criterion variables within the model was quantified similarly to R^2 : less than .04 was considered insignificant, between .04 and .25 small, between .25 and .64 moderate, and greater than .64 large.

As for indirect effects, they were quantified in terms of explained variance, following the criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph.

3. Results

3.1. Measurement Model Evaluation

Preliminarily, the oblique model showed a good fit (CFI = .973; RMSEA [90% CI] = .060 [.055, .064]; WRMR = 1.182), and significant reliability coefficients and interfactorial correlations ($> .20$) were observed among the constructs (Table 1).

Table 1

Construct reliability and interfactorial correlations

	ω	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social support (family)	.907	1				
2. Social support (friends)	.941	.347	1			
3. Academic engagement	.916	.539	.209	1		
4. Academic self-efficacy	.929	.523	.236	.718	1	
5. Academic performance	.913	.167	.051	.248	.355	1

Note: ω : omega coefficient

3.2. Evaluation of Research Hypotheses

Regarding the overall assessment of the proposed model, it showed favorable fit indices (CFI = .979; RMSEA [90% CI] = .053 [.048, .058]; WRMR = 1.120). The first hypothesis (Family and friends' social support

directly and positively influences academic engagement) and the second hypothesis (Family and friends' social support directly and positively influences academic self-efficacy) receive partial support, as only family support significantly influences academic engagement and academic self-efficacy at a high level ($\gamma > .50$) and a low level ($\gamma < .30$), respectively.

On the other hand, the third hypothesis (Academic self-efficacy directly and positively influences academic engagement) is supported, showing a high influence ($\gamma > .50$), although the fourth hypothesis (Academic engagement directly and positively influences academic performance) did not receive favorable evidence. Conversely, the fifth hypothesis (Academic self-efficacy directly and positively influences academic performance) is supported, demonstrating a moderate influence ($\gamma > .30$).

Regarding explained variance, the model moderately explains the variance in academic self-efficacy ($R^2 = .275$) and academic engagement ($R^2 = .554$), while the explained variance in academic performance could be considered low ($R^2 = .140$).

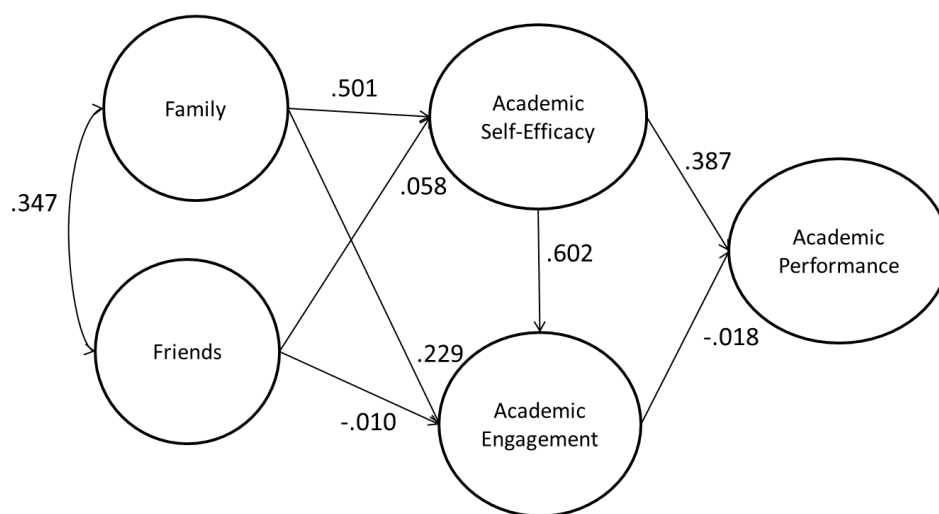


Figure 2. Explanatory model of academic performance

Regarding the sixth hypothesis (Family and friends' social support, considering the mediating role of academic engagement and academic self-efficacy, indirectly and positively influences academic performance), the data suggest partial support, considering that only the dimension related to family, and in the presence of academic self-efficacy, shows an indirect and positive influence (Table 2).

Table 2

Factorial parameters of the oblique three-factor model by age

Associations	Effects
Effects of social support (Family) on academic performance	
Total indirect effect	.203
Specific indirect effect	
SS (Family) → ASE → AP	.209
SS (Family) → ASE → AE → AP	-.006
Effects of social support (Friends) on academic performance	
Total indirect effect	.024
Specific indirect effect	
SS (Friends) → ASE → AP	.024

Note: SS = Social Support; ASE = Academic Self-Efficacy; AP = Academic Performance; AE = Academic Engagement

4. Discussion

The present research aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that enhance academic performance in Peruvian students, specifically perceived social support, academic self-efficacy, and academic engagement. After presenting the theoretical foundations and assumptions, justifying the chosen methodological approaches, and disseminating and discussing the findings, it became possible to systematize the results obtained through a deeper level of reflection.

There is evidence of the influence of perceived social support from family and friends on academic self-efficacy (Izar de la Fuente et al., 2019; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2017; Kortaş & Özcan, 2022) and academic engagement (Miranda-Zapata et al., 2018; Miranda-Zapata et al., 2021; Winter et al., 2020). However, the importance of these factors tends to lean towards family support (Ansong et al., 2017). In this regard, the inclusion of family and friends' social support in the model allowed visualizing that family support is more relevant both in terms of academic self-efficacy and academic engagement. Therefore, the existence of family support will enable students to form and consolidate a set of beliefs about their capabilities to adjust to the potential challenges of the school environment, thereby increasing their adaptability, cohesion, and resilience to cope with potential stress levels (Estrada & Mamani, 2020).

The influence of academic self-efficacy on academic engagement is well-documented (Sağkal & Sönmez 2021; Usán-Supervía et al., 2018). Therefore, beliefs about one's capabilities increase the likelihood of actively engaging in academic tasks inherent to school life. On the other hand, while there is previous evidence of the independent influence of academic self-efficacy and academic engagement on academic performance (Miranda-Zapata et al., 2021; Sarmiento-Martínez et al., 2022; Usán-Supervía & Quílez-Robres, 2021), in this study, only academic self-efficacy showed significant influence. Thus, academic self-efficacy is crucial as it represents a belief that prevails in the student's effort, persistence, and use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, influencing academic outcomes. Students who successfully complete school activities and achieve good academic performance experience a sense of confidence in their abilities, generally fostering renewed engagement in studying, leading to constant positive feedback. The lack of influence of academic engagement on academic performance is explained by its strong bivariate association with academic self-efficacy ($> .70$). When analyzing both variables together in the structural model, it gives greater importance to self-efficacy beliefs.

On the other hand, the research results are consistent with the influence of perceived social support on students' academic performance, with academic self-efficacy and academic engagement as mediating variables (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2008; Tomás et al., 2016). Several studies reveal that students exhibit better academic performance when they feel supported by social support, specifically, if this support comes from family members (Alarcón-Lucuy & Coca-Lopez, 2022; Martínez et al., 2020; Vasiliki, 2022) or peers (Buhs et al., 2006). The results indicate that the most significant influence on academic performance comes from the family sphere, with academic self-efficacy as a mediator. In other words, the constant support from the family shapes and consolidates students' self-efficacy beliefs, enhancing their academic performance.

Regarding limitations, the results of this study should be interpreted with caution, considering that the sample size, while large, does not allow for generalization to other regions due to a lack of geographical representativeness, needing expansion in future research. Another limitation is that it is a self-report instrument and is specifically aimed at a single data collection technique. However, the use of structural equation modeling represents a methodological strength because it allows for the simultaneous analysis of variables, given that there are some bivariate associations (e.g., correlations) with empirical evidence (e.g., academic engagement and academic performance) that are not replicated in the results due to the presence of other variables with greater explanatory relevance.

The practical implications of this study are diverse as it contributes to systematizing and operationalizing an analytical model to understand, in an interrelated and reflective manner, the dynamics established between the set of personal and contextual variables of students and their academic performance. Firstly, institutional and pedagogical management of educational centers needs to incorporate changes in educational environments and curricular designs to define policies and operationalize practices focused on the development of processes that can improve students' academic performance. For example, developing educational actions to promote parental involvement in the educational process (Cosso et al., 2022), considering the diversity of existing family environments (Alarcón-Lucuy & Coca-Lopez, 2022), and simultaneously increasing students' self-efficacy strategies to improve their academic performance (Eyni & Hashemi, 2022).

5. Conclusions

Regarding the overall model, it is concluded that perceived social support from the family, with academic self-efficacy as a mediator, positively impacts students' academic performance. Additionally, more specifically, academic self-efficacy influences academic engagement and academic performance.

Finally, it is recommended for future studies to use various methodologies simultaneously to reduce the impact of a single evaluation method or approach. Likewise, it would be interesting to employ longitudinal designs and have larger samples, if possible from both public and private institutions, considering the cultural and social diversity existing in all regions of Peru, as differences in learning preferences may be found based on demographic variables. Furthermore, in addition to academic variables, it would also be necessary to evaluate more stable aspects, such as personality (Serrano et al., 2022), considering the importance of some of its dimensions in academic performance (Bergold and Steinmayr, 2018; Morales-Vives et al., 2020), or emotional intelligence, whose relevance is emphasized in the post-pandemic context (Dominguez-Lara et al., 2023), as well as the possibility of massive assessments at the beginning of the school year.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

SDL, SV, and AAL conceptualized the study. **SDL, MDP, SNV, and AAL** wrote the initial draft of the manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript's progress and made significant contributions. **BPP** was responsible for data collection. **SDL** conducted the data analysis. The manuscript's content was approved by all authors.

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