



Positive Family Environment in School Adolescents: A Case Study in Azuay

*Ambiente familiar positivo en adolescentes escolarizados: un estudio de
caso en Azuay*

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Abstract

The positive family environment (PFE) was examined in 138 school adolescents from Azuay, Ecuador, using the FAMPOS Scale. Participants (50% female, 50% male) aged 12-17 years were assessed on four dimensions: cooperative, affective, economic, and educational interactions. The results show positive mean scores in all dimensions, with economic interactions ($M=3.16$) and affective interactions ($M=3.13$) standing out as the most developed. The correlations between dimensions were positive and significant ($r=0.52$ to 0.83), with the relationship between affective and cooperative interactions being the strongest ($r=0.83$). The scale demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha=0.89$). The findings reveal that families prioritize the management of resources and affective bonds, while educational interactions are less developed. These results contribute to the understanding of family dynamics in Latin American contexts and provide bases for family and educational interventions aimed at strengthening the family environment as a protective factor for adolescent development.

Keywords

Positive family environment, adolescents, FAMPOS, adolescent development, Ecuadorian context, family well-being.

Resumen

Se examinó el ambiente familiar positivo (PFE) en 138 adolescentes escolarizados de Azuay, Ecuador, utilizando la escala FAMPOS. Se evaluó a los participantes (50 % mujeres, 50 % hombres) de entre 12 y 17 años en cuatro dimensiones: interacciones cooperativas, afectivas, económicas y educativas. Los resultados muestran puntuaciones medias positivas en todas las dimensiones, destacando las interacciones económicas ($M = 3.16$) y afectivas ($M = 3.13$) como las más desarrolladas. Las correlaciones entre las dimensiones fueron positivas y significativas ($r = 0.52$ a 0.83), siendo la relación entre las interacciones afectivas y cooperativas la más fuerte ($r = 0.83$). La escala demostró una excelente fiabilidad ($\alpha=0.89$). Los resultados revelan que las familias dan prioridad a la gestión de los recursos y los vínculos afectivos, mientras que las interacciones educativas están menos desarrolladas. Estos resultados contribuyen a la comprensión de la dinámica familiar en los contextos latinoamericanos y proporcionan bases para intervenciones familiares y educativas destinadas a fortalecer el entorno familiar como factor de protección para el desarrollo de los adolescentes.

Palabras claves

Ambiente familiar positivo, adolescentes, FAMPOS, desarrollo adolescente, contexto ecuatoriano, bienestar familiar.

Introduction

The family environment has become one of the microsystems that generates the greatest effect on the development of children and adolescents, since it structures the bases around social, psychological, and academic aspects (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Botelho Guedes et al., 2022; Boyd et al., 2022; Jankowska et al., 2024). A positive family environment (PFE) provided with cohesion, warmth, and assertive communication provides adequate elements to

face the challenges of integral development, facilitating the well-being of schoolchildren and the relevant adaptation to different contexts (Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Niu et al., 2024).

Positive psychology has made contributions by pointing out the importance of human functioning under optimal conditions instead of highlighting the deficiencies of the family system (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this sense, classical analytical frameworks have been replaced by models that are aimed at exploring and making visible positive family interactions and their contribution to the evolution of schoolchildren (Corral et al., 2014).

There is consistent evidence on the relationship of positive family environments with higher levels of self-esteem, increased academic results, decreased behavioral problems, and adequate mental health in schoolchildren (Montoya & Corona, 2021; Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Barreto-Zarza et al., 2021). Relationships, however, show high variability due to contextual and cultural differences, so the need for research that aims at a deep understanding of the dynamics within the family is still required.

Previous research has specified several dimensions that allow a profile of the PFEs to be established (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Cohesion, flexibility, and communication have traditionally been considered as cornerstones of family functioning (Villarreal & Paz, 2017). Cohesion refers to the emotional bond that prevails between family members (Reyes et al., 2019), communication contributes to the integration between dimensions through open and clear interaction; while flexibility refers to the ability to adapt to different contextual variables and stressful changes (Villarreal & Paz, 2017). The background review shows that AFPs exhibit an indirect relationship with symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety (Niu et al., 2024); while direct and positive associations have been observed, with improvements in positive affect, life satisfaction indexes and better self-esteem (Tan et al., 2020).

The Positive Family Environment Scale - FAMPOS (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023) constitutes a framework for analysis of the PFE, based on 4 dimensions:

The cooperative dimension refers to the dynamics of collaboration and reciprocal assistance that are established among family members with the purpose of achieving shared goals. This facet evidences the ability of the family nucleus to act in a coordinated manner and provide support in daily activities and individual projects (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023). Previous studies have shown that family contexts characterized by cooperation favor the development of social competencies, conflict resolution skills, and altruistic behaviors in the adolescent population (Corral et al., 2014).

The affective dimension includes the manifestations of attention, affection, and emotional support that develop within the family (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023). This facet aligns with the concept of parental warmth and its beneficial effects on adolescent growth, as previous research has established that warm and affectionate family environments favor psychological balance, positive self-esteem, and secure attachment bonds (Gutiérrez et al., 2021).

The economic dimension is related to the appropriate management of available resources and the coverage of material demands. This facet shows the ability of the family group to use resources optimally and cover fundamental needs (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023). Economic strength and appropriate management of resources have been linked to higher academic achievement and reduced levels of tension in young people (Alonso-Pérez et al., 2022).

The educational dimension includes the mechanisms of instruction and acquisition of knowledge that occur in the family environment. This facet recognizes the home as a formative space where knowledge, principles, and skills are shared (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023). Studies have confirmed that educationally oriented family environments promote superior school performance, intellectual progress, and positive dispositions towards the learning process (Zhao & Zhao, 2022).

Studies related to the family context in Ecuador have shown a restricted scope, especially those that focus on the constructive aspects of the functioning of the family nucleus. Reyes et al. (2019) analyzed the PFE in a city in Guayas, determining that family unity and expressive capacity were correlated with a decrease in levels of aggressiveness in the adolescent population analyzed. Thus, the protective function exercised by constructive family dynamics in the face of behavioral difficulties in the Ecuadorian environment was underlined.

The bibliographic synthesis carried out highlights the relevance of researching the PFEs in particular and diverse cultural frameworks such as those in Ecuador. Although research on family functioning and PFEs has experienced considerable growth in recent decades, there is still a need to develop studies that analyze constructive family facets in varied populations, especially in Hispanic American settings. Public educational institutions in urban areas such as those existing in the Province of Azuay provide services to heterogeneous populations with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, constituting scenarios of great value to analyze the functioning of family environments. This research seeks to contribute to this field through the PFE examination in adolescent students from the Province of Azuay using the FAMPOS scale.

Methodology

The research was based on a cross-sectional design, of a descriptive and correlational nature, to examine the PFE in young students from Azuay, Ecuador. The descriptive approach facilitated an exhaustive characterization of the dimensions explored in the sample, while the correlational approach explored the relationships between these dimensions. The design was suitable for investigating phenomena in particular frameworks and population groups.

The population was made up of 214 students of Basic Education and Baccalaureate from a rural public school with fiscal support. A randomized sample of 138 students was selected, taking care to comply with gender equity. The sample consisted of 69 women (50%) with a mean age of 14.1 years ($SD = 2.1$) and 69 men (50%) with a mean age of 15.0 years ($SD = 2.2$).

The FAMPOS Scale developed by Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández (2023) was applied, an instrument built and validated for Spanish-speaking adolescents, which has cultural adaptation to the Ecuadorian context. The scale has high psychometric properties and good internal consistency for all dimensions (Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández, 2023). Even so, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for the four dimensions and the Scale as a whole. FAMPOS consists of 20 items distributed in four dimensions:

- a. Cooperative Interactions (D1 - COI): which includes six items that assess mutual support and collaboration among family members to achieve common goals and complete daily tasks. Examples of items include, "We help each other with homework" and "We help each other reach our goals."
- b. Affective interactions (D2 - AFI): includes five items that evaluate expressions of love, care, and emotional support within the family. Some examples of them are: "We all feel loved" and "We show affection and care to each other".
- c. Economic interactions (D3 - ECI): includes three items that measure the management of resources and the satisfaction of material needs within the family. Examples of these are: "We support each other in needs" and "We take care of household resources".
- d. Educational Interactions (D4 - EDI): includes five items that assess the teaching and learning processes within the family context. Typical items are: "We learn new things as a family" and "We teach each other things".

The instrument consists of a 5-point Likert scale that includes 0 (Never) to 4 (Always), where the highest means would indicate better AFPs for each dimension. The study included ethical guidelines for work with adolescents. The questionnaire was administered in the classroom during the start of the 2025-2026 school year. Instructions were provided to the participants, and the confidentiality of the information collected was informed.

Descriptive statistics [means (M) and standard deviations (SD)] were calculated for each dimension of the scale. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were used to measure the internal consistency of the dimensions and that of FAMPOS. Bivariate correlations were based on Spearman's rho due to the non-normality of the data. The statistical significance of hypothesis testing was established at $p < 0.05$. Jamovi 2.7.6.0 software was used.

Results

Descriptive analysis: Tables 1 and 2 present the means, standard deviations and reliability coefficients for all dimensions and individual items.

Table 1

Descriptive and reliability of the FAMPOS scale: cooperative and affective interactions.

Scale and dimensions	M	SD	Cronbach's Alfa
PFE			0.89
COI			0.83
We help each other with schoolwork	2.82	1.14	
We cooperate to set the table for eating	2.80	1.28	
We help each other meet our goals	3.16	1.81	
We help those who carried out an activity	3.11	2.01	
We cooperate to clean the table	3.01	2.11	
We make activities easy	2.99	2.23	
AFI			0.85
We show each other love and affection	3.19	2.02	
We were affectionate with each other	3.16	1.90	
We express affection for each other	3.14	1.79	
We all feel loved	3.13	1.82	
We listen to each other	3.03	2.05	

The reliability of the scale was excellent ($\alpha = 0.89$), indicating high internal FAMPOS consistency. The reliability of the dimensions was good, with coefficients ranging from 0.82 (ECI) to 0.86 (EDI). These values exceeded the recommended criterion of 0.70 for acceptable reliability (Oviedo & Campo-Arias, 2005), supporting the internal consistency of the scale in this Ecuadorian sample.

The averages of the scores by dimension indicate that the ECIs presented the highest scores ($M = 3.16$, calculated from the average of the three items: 3.17, 3.00 and 3.31), closely followed by the AFIs ($M = 3.13$, average of: 3.19, 3.16, 3.14, 3.13 and 3.03). COIs scored an average of $M = 2.98$ (average of: 2.82, 2.80, 3.16, 3.11, 3.01 and 2.99), while EDIs recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.93$, average of: 2.94, 2.82, 2.99, 2.80 and 3.08). The scores, located between "Sometimes" (2) and "Most of the time" (3) on the scale, express a generally positive perception of the family environment among the participants.

Within the COI dimension, the item "We help each other meet our goals" received the highest score ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.81$), while "We cooperate to set the table for lunch" obtained the lowest score ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.28$). This suggests that families tend to provide general support for goal achievement, but collaboration on routine household chores may be less systematic. In the AFIs, "We show each other affection and affection" received the highest rating ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 2.02$), while "We listen to each other" received the lowest ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 2.05$). The pattern shows that direct expressions of affection are more frequent than active listening practices, although both maintain considerably positive levels.

Table 2

Descriptiveness and reliability of the FAMPOS scale: economic and educational interactions.

Scale and dimensions	Media	SD	Cronbach's Alfa
ECI			0.82
We take care of the resources of the home	3.17	1.98	
We rely on the needs	3.00	1.80	
We take care of home services	3.31	1.87	
EDI			0.86
We teach each other things	2.94	2.10	
We learned something that another member taught	2.82	2.12	
We learned from each other	2.99	2.17	
When something new was learned, it taught us	2.80	2.32	
We learned new things as a family	3.08	2.21	

For EDIs, "We care for household services" received the highest score ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.87$), while "We lean on needs" scored the lowest ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.80$). This reflects a prioritization of the maintenance of basic services over interpersonal economic support.

In the EDI dimension, "We learned new things as a family" achieved the best score ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 2.21$), while "When something new was learned, it taught us" recorded the lowest score ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 2.32$). This suggests that families engage in collective learning experiences, but the systematic exchange of individual knowledge is less frequent.

Relatively high SD (between 1.14 and 2.32) indicate considerable variability in responses, reflecting the diversity of family environments in the sample and the heterogeneity of family dynamics in this population.

Correlational análisis: The correlational analysis specified the relationships between the four dimensions of the PFE using the Spearman test. Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations between dimensions (Table 3).

Table 3

Correlations between FAMPOS dimensions

	AFI	ECI	EDI	COI
AFI	--	0.59*	0.80**	0.83**
ECI	0.59*	--	0.62*	0.71**
EDI	0.80**	0.62*	--	0.52*
COI	0.83**	0.71**	0.52*	--

Note: AFI: Affective interaction; ECI: Economic interaction; EDI: Educational interaction; COI: Cooperative interaction. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

The calculations show that correlations were direct/positive and also statistically significant, indicating that the various aspects of the PFE tend to coexist. The strongest correlation was observed between AFI and COI ($r = 0.83$, $p < 0.01$), inferring a substantial overlap between emotional bonds and family collaborative behaviors. Secondly, the most notorious correlation was seen between AFI and EDI ($r = 0.80$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that emotional support is closely associated with the teaching-learning processes within families (Table 3).

ECIs showed moderate to strong correlations with the other dimensions: for example, with COI ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$), with EDIs ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.05$), and finally with AFI ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$). Such rho reflect that efficient resource management is manifested with all aspects of family functioning. Although significant, the weakest correlation was observed between EDIs and COIs ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$), so these aspects, although related, may reflect different aspects of family functioning (Table 3).

Discussion

The internal consistency of FAMPOS ($\alpha = 0.89$) and its dimensions ($\alpha = 0.82$ to 0.86) supports the cross-cultural reliability of the instrument, being consistent with the original study by Aranda Corrales & Valenzuela-Hernández (2023) and confirms its applicability in diverse Hispanic American populations.

The average positive scores in all dimensions are encouraging, considering that PFEs are systematically associated with better psychological, social, and academic outcomes in adolescents (Gutiérrez et al., 2021; Montoya & Corona, 2021). However, the specific pattern of scores reveals important aspects about family priorities and characteristics in this context.

The predominance of ECIs ($M = 3.16$) possibly reflects the socioeconomic realities of Ecuador, where families must devote significant attention to the management of limited resources. The finding is concurrent with that expressed by Alonso-Pérez et al. (2022), who point out that economic stability provides the basis for other family processes, especially in contexts with

socioeconomic challenges. The item with the highest score in the dimension, "We take care of household services" ($M = 3.31$), highlighting a family culture oriented towards the preservation of basic resources as a fundamental priority.

High scores on AFIs ($M = 3.13$) align with Hispanic cultural values that emphasize strong family bonds and expressions of affection (Reyes et al., 2019). Specifically, "We show each other affection and affection" ($M = 3.19$) indicated that direct expressions of love constitute an identifiable family strength. However, the relatively lower score on "We hear each other" ($M = 3.03$) reveals areas of opportunity in two-way communication skills.

COIs ($M = 2.98$) show an interesting pattern: while "We help each other meet our goals" scored highly ($M = 3.16$), collaborative household chores such as "We cooperate to set the table" ($M = 2.80$) were less frequent. This reflects a family structure where support for important objectives coexists with a less systematic distribution of domestic tasks.

EDIs ($M = 2.93$) presented the lowest scores, which is consistent with research that highlights that family educational practices may be limited by educational level and parental resources (Piot et al., 2022). The difference between "We learned new things as a family" ($M = 3.08$) and "When something new was learned, it taught us" ($M = 2.80$) indicates that families value collective learning but lack systematic mechanisms for the exchange of individual knowledge. The pattern of correlations confirmed the multidimensional yet coherent nature of the AFP, providing evidence of construct validity for FAMPOS. The significant positive correlations between all dimensions support the theoretical conceptualization of the family environment as an integrated system (García-Méndez et al., 2006).

The strongest correlation between AFI and COI ($r = 0.83$) revealed that positive emotional climate facilitates collaborative behaviors, creating virtuous circles where affection promotes cooperation and vice versa. This detected relationship aligns with family systems theory that emphasizes the interconnectedness of family processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The robust correlation between AFI and EDI ($r = 0.80$) highlights the importance of emotional climate for family learning, coinciding with research showing that warm environments facilitate knowledge transfer (Zhao & Zhao, 2022). Adolescents in affectively positive families may feel more secure to explore, ask questions and share learning.

The significant correlations of ECIs with all other dimensions ($r = 0.59$ to 0.71) confirmed the relevant role of material stability as a basis for other family processes. This empirically supports hierarchical models where economic security enables higher-level family functions (Alonso-Pérez et al., 2022).

The lower correlation between EDI and COI ($r = 0.52$) suggests that these dimensions, although related, maintain some independence. Families can develop differentiated strengths according to their specific characteristics (Corral et al., 2014).

Conclusions

The study provided robust evidence on the validity and reliability of the FAMPOS scale in the Ecuadorian context, confirming its cross-cultural applicability in Hispanic American populations. Participating adolescents generally report PFE, with particular strengths in the management of economic resources and affective bonds.

The findings have revealed a specific pattern where the families examined prioritize economic stability and affective expressions. Systematic EDIs are less developed. The significant correlations identified between all dimensions confirm the systemic condition of the PFE, where the different aspects are reinforced with interdependence.

The considerable variability observed in the responses is an indicator of the diversity of family environments in the group studied, reflecting the socio-cultural heterogeneity that characterizes the Ecuadorian rural context. It is recommended that the educational institution develop family strengthening programs that take advantage of the affective strengths that have been identified as the basis for strengthening EDI; as well as creating spaces for collaboration and family-

school interaction that recognize and value the different family strengths. Future research could focus on examining the specific relationship between PFEs and academic performance, as well as psychological well-being and social competences in adolescents.

The research showed that the family contexts explored have significant resources and strengths that, properly identified and enhanced, can contribute to the integral development of adolescents and the strengthening of the community social fabric.

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