

## PERSONAL COMPETENCIES OF SPANISH STUDENTS PURSUING DIFFERENT ACADEMIC CAREERS. CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFLECTIONS FROM POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY.

### *COMPETENCIAS PERSONALES EN ESTUDIANTES ESPAÑOLES QUE SIGUEN DISTINTAS TRAYECTORIAS ACADÉMICAS. APORTACIONES Y REFLEXIONES DESDE LA PSICOLOGÍA POSITIVA.*

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#### Abstract

This investigation analyzes a sample of 332 Spanish teenagers following different academic careers and the relationship among four emergent cognitive concepts in positive psychology: dispositional optimism, hope, self-efficiency and the sense of coherence. The results indicate statistically significant differences between individuals who have pursued successful academic careers, regardless of the direction towards university or professional orientation, and those who have had unsuccessful academic backgrounds. Furthermore, there are interrelationships between all constructs considered, clearly defining a positive development profile in adolescents, which suggest further research and development of different human performance indicators to promote positive development in adolescents. *Keywords:* Optimism, positive adolescent development, academic success, education system.

## Resumen

En este trabajo se analizan en una muestra de 332 adolescentes españoles con distintas trayectorias académicas las relaciones entre cuatro constructos cognitivos emergentes en el campo de la psicología positiva: el optimismo disposicional, la esperanza, la autoeficacia y el sentido de coherencia. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que se encuentran diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre los adolescentes que han seguido trayectorias académicas de éxito, independientemente de su orientación a la universidad u otras preferencias académicas. Por su parte, se encuentran interrelaciones entre todos los constructos considerados, que si bien pueden definir un perfil de desarrollo positivo adolescente, también suponen distintos elementos del funcionamiento humano que hay que conocer y desarrollar para promover dicho desarrollo positivo adolescente.

*Palabras clave:* Optimismo, desarrollo positivo adolescente, emociones, sistema educativo.

## Introduction

Positive psychology has greatly expanded in recent years, with a breakthrough in research over the past ten years since Seligman (2002) proposed this new approach to psychology in various forums. A large number of psychological constructs have become widespread through this process, on occasion with extensive development, whereas other constructs have become established more recently. Though the focus does not necessarily pose a revolution in the field of psychology, it has allowed for the resuming of functional aspects and areas of research that denote an important contribution to psychology in areas such as education, to which we refer in this investigation. Accordingly, the concept of positive development in adolescents has emerged in current research in this field. It addresses an area of development from a perspective of the acquisition of competencies rather than issues that arise during adolescence and also stresses the importance of context in the development and progression of this stage (Oliva et al., 2010; Orejudo and Teruel, 2009).

As we have pointed out, this peak in positive psychology reflects a variety of emerging constructs, apparent in various manuals of positive psychology (Gilman, Huebner & Furlong, 2009; Snyder & Lopez, 2005). Among these, we considered certain constructs to be useful when addressing this notion of positive development in adolescents, focusing our research on those concepts referring to personal characteristics. Theoretically, these constructs are based on self-regulatory models of behavior and are useful in predicting

psychological adjustment. The applicability of this study is paramount in the field of education as it may help identify the elements that constitute positive development and foster suggestions to define competencies for the advancement of educational institutions (Orejudo & Teruel, 2009). In the same way, such constructs provide theoretical guidance for educational research based on positive psychology among adolescents (Orejudo, Puyuelo, Fernández-Turrado & Ramos, 2012).

Following this approach, in this study we analyze adolescent development from the perspective of dispositional optimism (Carver & Scheier, 2005), hope (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, Rand & Sigmon, 2005), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Maddux, 2005) and complete sense of coherence; novel theoretical contributions in this field of study (Antonowski, 1991; Palacios-Espinosa & Restrepo-Espinosa, 2008). Considering these developments, we analyze to what extent common or differential elements are founded in the behavior of adolescents. Accordingly, collective research demonstrates a high level of interrelationships among these constructs. For example Pacico, Zanon, Bastiaello & Hutz (2011) establish this among hope, optimism and self-esteem while Hughes, Galbraith & White (2011) and Sanmartin, Carbonell & Baths (2011) support an interrelationship with self-efficacy. Yet it is unclear if these studies have distinctive theoretical implications (Hughes et al., 2011; Sanmartin et al., 2011). In practice, it is necessary to proceed from a model of personal behavior and comprehend the context that favors such, so as not only to

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