

Revista ID EST
Investigación Desarrollo Educativo Servicio
Trabajo

Vol. 6 No. 2. 2026

Editado por

FUNDES

Fundación Universitaria de Estudios Superiores
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Citación.

Ramírez, D., Méndez, S. (2026) Family support
as a strategy for the comprehensive
development of adolescents in Colombia. *ID
EST - Revista Investigación, Desarrollo,
Educación, Servicio Y Trabajo*, 6(2), 47-59

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Family support as a strategy for the comprehensive development of adolescents in Colombia

Acompañamiento familiar como estrategia para la formación integral de adolescentes en Colombia

Delly Ramírez Oviedo¹, Sandra Isabel Méndez²

Abstract

This study aimed to implement an innovative family support strategy to strengthen family dynamics during the academic process of adolescent students at a public educational institution in Colombia. The method used was qualitative with an action-research design and descriptive scope, developed in four phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Expert-validated questionnaires, focus group interviews, and five experiential workshops focused on assertive communication, emotional management, and shared family time were used. Participants included 30 tenth-grade students and their families from an Educational Institution in Tolima. The main results show that 72.4% of students perceive a good family relationship, although 43.3% share little time with their families; 83.3% reported improvements in perceived academic support after the intervention, and three fundamental categories emerged: autonomy, emotional management, and family time. It is concluded that structured family interventions through pedagogical workshops positively impact school performance and comprehensive education, strengthening family-school bonds and promoting spaces for adolescents' emotional expression.

Keywords: family support, comprehensive education, academic performance, adolescents, action-research.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo implementar una estrategia innovadora de acompañamiento familiar, para fortalecer la dinámica familiar durante el proceso académico, de estudiantes adolescentes de una institución educativa pública en Colombia. El método empleado fue cualitativo con diseño de investigación-acción y alcance descriptivo, desarrollado en cuatro fases: planificación, acción, observación y reflexión. Se utilizaron cuestionarios validados por expertos, entrevistas con grupos focales y cinco talleres vivenciales centrados en comunicación asertiva, manejo emocional y tiempo compartido en familia. Los participantes fueron 30 estudiantes de grado décimo y sus familias de una Institución Educativa, del Tolima. Los resultados principales evidencian que el 72.4% de los estudiantes percibe una buena relación familiar, aunque el 43.3% comparte poco tiempo con sus familias; el 83.3% reportó mejoras en la percepción de apoyo académico tras la intervención, y emergieron tres categorías fundamentales: autonomía, manejo de emociones y tiempo en familia. Se concluye que las intervenciones familiares estructuradas mediante talleres pedagógicos impactan positivamente el desempeño escolar y la formación integral, fortaleciendo los vínculos familia-escuela y promoviendo espacios para la expresión emocional de los adolescentes.

Palabras clave: acompañamiento familiar, formación integral, desempeño académico, adolescentes, investigación-acción.

Introduction

Education is a process of shaping individuals that encompasses cognitive, social, cultural, emotional, and physical dimensions. In Colombia, the General Education Law (1994) establishes the holistic development of individuals as its primary objective. This responsibility does not rest solely with educational institutions but also involves families and society at large. For this reason, family support is a fundamental pillar of students' holistic development. Various authors have highlighted the close relationship between family support and students' academic performance (Cáceres, 2024; Mamani, 2010; Pérez, 2022).

In Colombia, as in other Latin American countries, school dropout, grade repetition, and academic failure are phenomena that require attention not only from governments but also from all stakeholders in the education system. During the elementary school years, parental support is greater than in middle and high school (Alama Duarte & Obaco Soto, 2024). Meanwhile, Vanegas et al. (2023) reaffirm this finding by showing that in families where parental support is lacking, this directly influences not only academic performance but also students' personal presentation.

The study presented here aimed to implement an innovative strategy that would help strengthen family dynamics during the academic journey of adolescent students at an educational institution in Colombia. The context in which the research was conducted

is characterized by challenges in family dynamics, such as a lack of parental support in the educational process, domestic violence, and adults' lack of understanding regarding the changes adolescents undergo and how they manage their emotions. This situation is not unique to the context studied; however, it serves as a potential reference point for determining how the implementation of a family support strategy can contribute to the holistic development of students.

Family Support and Family Dynamics

The family is a social structure composed of individuals who share biological, emotional, social, and legal ties (Castillo et al., 2024). As the fundamental nucleus for the construction of society, the family serves as a space for interaction among its members. Family dynamics are thus understood as the relationship between the roles played by each member, their duties and rights, and the emotions that intertwine within that relationship to facilitate communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Castillo et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Montoya et al. (2021) explain that the family serves as an emotional support system for adolescents, as it is called upon to promote their well-being, mental health, and holistic development. Thus, positive family dynamics foster healthy interaction among family members, promoting not only the physical and emotional development of adolescents but also leading to more satisfactory academic performance compared to students from families characterized by the absence or lack of parental support.

According to Guevara et al. (2021), family dynamics centered on assertive communication among family members enable the holistic development of young people. Communication is the foundation that allows individuals to understand one another at both the family and social levels.

Assertive communication centers on respect for and appreciation of others. Adolescence is a stage in which the proper management of emotions is essential for building interpersonal relationships, making decisions, and developing autonomy.

Recent studies, such as that by Remar (2024), show that families today have less and less time to spend with their children. Factors such as work and long hours, extensive commuting in cities, household responsibilities, and the use of mobile devices, among others, have led to a deterioration in family relationships and increased anxiety and stress among young people and children. Parents who spend little time with their

children—or who have little free time to engage in play activities with children and adolescents—are also unable to find time to support their children with homework or school responsibilities. Salas et al. (2022) suggest that concentration, motivation, and a willingness to learn are greater among children and adolescents whose parents spend quality time with them.

The Role of the Family in Academic Performance

As noted above, the family plays an important role in the holistic development of young people. According to UNESCO (2017), the family also influences the academic performance of children and adolescents. Furthermore, the family is responsible for a child's early education before school begins. However, collaboration between family and school not only enriches the learning process but also the emotional and social development of children and adolescents (Rojas et al., 2024).

In the holistic development of students—and especially among adolescents—the family and school environments play a decisive role in the development of emotional, social, and affective skills (Ahedo et al., 2021). With regard to academic performance, family support—along with motivation, context, and teaching methodology, among other factors—can influence the creation of an environment that either fosters or hinders learning. A student's academic performance is thus determined by various elements that, together with their family circumstances, can lead to successful learning. According to Lamas (2015), academic performance is the process of achieving goals or objectives within the teaching-learning process, which is mediated by contextual and family conditions, taking into account the learner's aptitudes and experiences.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach with an action-research design and a descriptive scope. According to García (2023), action research enables the resolution of social or community problems in which participants are key actors in the development of the intervention. In accordance with the chosen design, action research consists of the following phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the first phase—planning—the problem to be solved is identified, and an action plan is created. During the action phase, the plan is implemented. During the observation phase, the results of the action are examined. And finally, during the reflection phase, the results of the implementation are analyzed, and the plan is adjusted.

Through an innovative pedagogical intervention in the form of workshops, the study sought to generate a positive impact on the population's academic performance. The workshops focused on the interplay between communicative and emotional dimensions in family dynamics.

Regarding the study population, the universe consisted of 103 10th-grade students from a public school in the municipality of Carmen de Apicalá in Tolima; from this group, a representative sample of 30%—corresponding to 30 students—was selected.

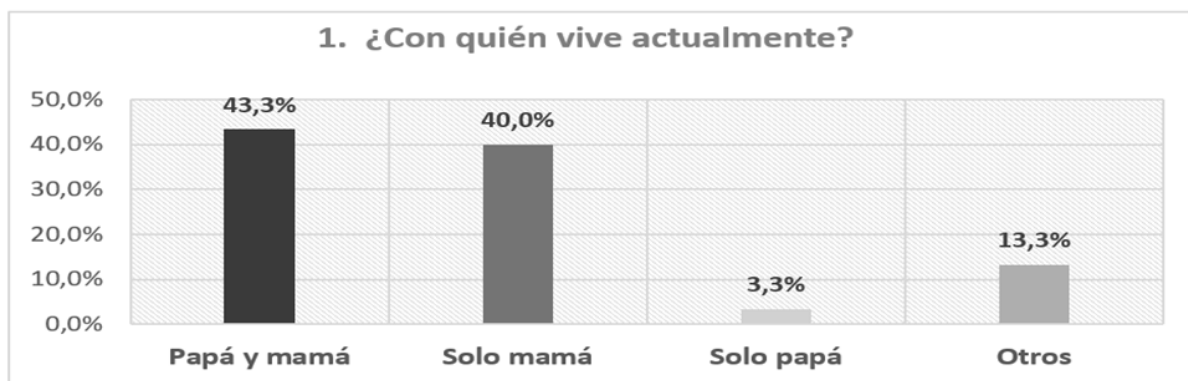
The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire and a focus group interview. In both cases, the instruments were validated by experts and underwent a pilot testing process. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the students' parents for their participation in the research. The questionnaire was chosen to gather data on categories such as parental support in school-related matters, habits within the home, conceptions of a life plan, and the educational level of the immediate family, among other important concepts. Once the information on the population had been collected, the workshops were designed.

Results

The results of the questionnaire administered to 10th-grade students allow for an analysis of the relationship between family dynamics, social-emotional well-being, and academic performance among the adolescents participating in the study.

First, the students' family structure shows that a significant proportion lives with only one parent or with other relatives. This family configuration may limit consistent support and the formation of stable emotional bonds, which affects the amount of time spent together and the creation of family dynamics conducive to adolescents' holistic development, as noted by Lamas (2015).

Figure 1. Family structure of the students



Note: Prepared by the authors, 2026.

Time spent with family emerges as a significant factor in emotional well-being and academic performance. The results show that, for a significant portion of the students, family life has an intermittent or direct influence on their school performance, while others perceive a lesser impact. However, family support is established as a key element for adolescents' academic motivation and emotional stability.

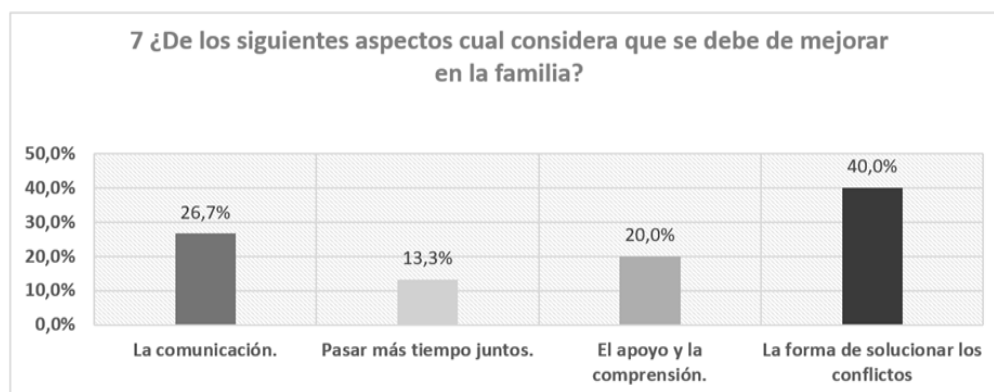
Figure 2. Influence of time spent with family on academic performance.



Note: Prepared by the author, 2026.

Regarding family aspects that require strengthening, students primarily identify difficulties related to communication, conflict resolution, and emotional support. These situations affect the quality of family relationships and can generate tensions that negatively impact adolescents' social-emotional well-being, affecting their educational progress.

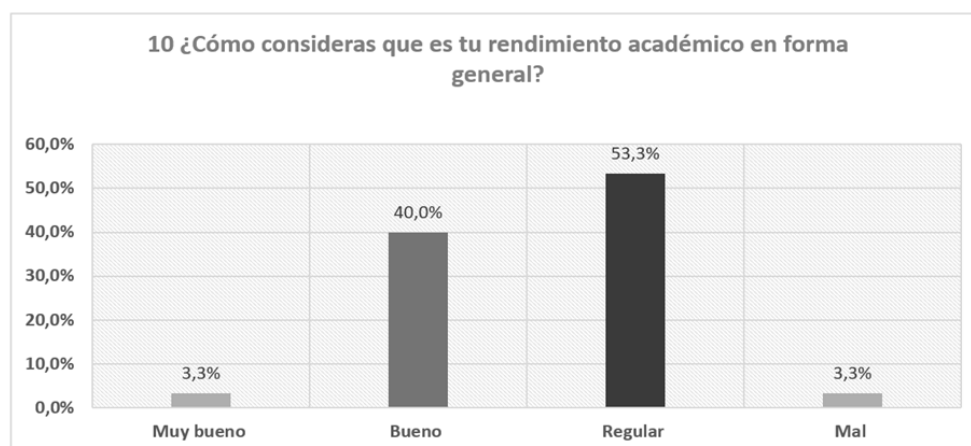
Figure 3. Family aspects that need to be strengthened



Note: Prepared by the authors, 2026.

Furthermore, students' self-perception of academic performance indicates that most students rate themselves at levels ranging from average to good, reflecting a critical assessment of their own performance. This perception is closely related to the level of guidance, support, and communication they receive within the family environment.

Figure 4. Self-perception of academic performance

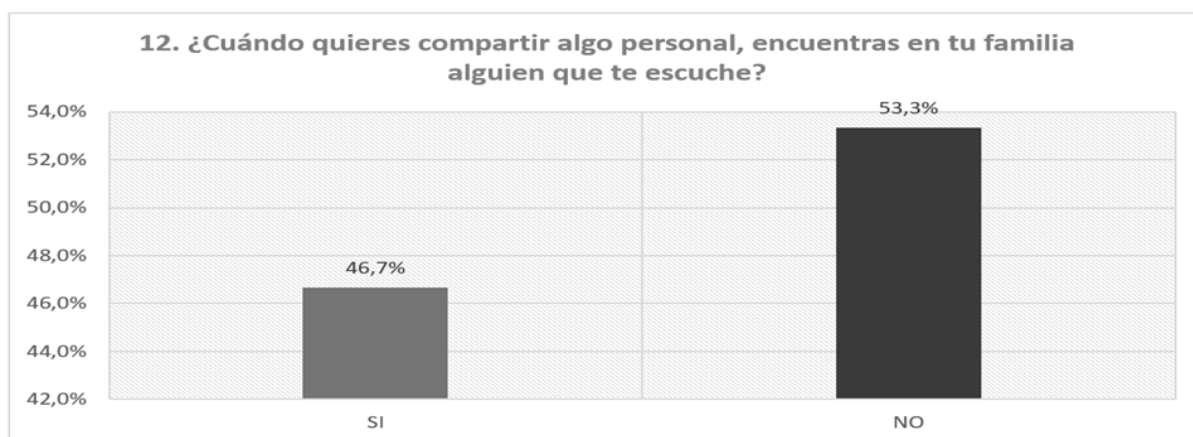


Note: Prepared by the authors, 2026.

Finally, the results related to active listening and family dynamics highlight the need to strengthen opportunities for dialogue between parents and children. The absence of active listening within the family unit affects adolescents' self-esteem, emotional

regulation, and responsible decision-making, reaffirming the importance of healthy and supportive family environments for students' holistic and academic development.

Figure 5. *Perceptions of Listening and Family Dynamics*



Note: Author's own work, 2026

The implementation of the innovative family support strategy reveals a deep connection between intra-family dynamics and the academic performance of adolescents in Colombian public educational settings, particularly at the Pedro Pabón Parga Technical School in Carmen de Apicalá (Tolima). The results obtained—derived from diagnostic surveys and evidence from five experiential workshops—show that 72.4% of students perceive their family relationship as “good,” though marked by differences, while 43.3% spend little time with their family members, which directly impacts their motivation at school (53.3% self-perceive their performance as “average”). This correlation aligns with sociocultural perspectives that position the family as a “zone of proximal development,” where affective interactions mediate cognitive and emotional learning (Vygotsky, 1978/2021).

Thus, the lack of assertive communication—cited by 26.7% of participants—not only perpetuates conflicts (33.3% report constant arguments) but also limits the development of responsible autonomy, which is essential during adolescence for the transition toward academic and personal independence.

From a critical perspective, the workshops demonstrated notable qualitative transformations. Activities such as “Your Hugs and Words of Love Hurt Me” and “Role-Playing” fostered empathy and active listening, moving from initial forced expressions to spontaneous hugs and deep emotional reflections—as in the case of

the father who acknowledged his emotional detachment at work. These findings contrast with reported dysfunctional family dynamics, where 53.3% of students do not feel heard by their families, aligning with studies linking parental emotional validation to greater academic resilience in vulnerable contexts (Guevara et al., 2021). However, the partial dropout rate (24 out of 30 families completed the program) highlights structural limitations: long work hours and excessive use of digital devices fragment shared time, a phenomenon exacerbated in lower socioeconomic strata where 40% live with only their mother. This reality challenges the traditional school model, which delegates holistic education exclusively to the institution, ignoring the shared family responsibility stipulated in Law 115 of 1994.

In epistemological terms, action research—with its phases of planning, action, observation, and reflection—emerges as the ideal methodology for local contexts, as it involves participants as co-constructors of knowledge (García, 2023). Triangulated data (surveys, photos, audio recordings) confirm that brief interventions (5 weeks) generate sustainable impacts in emerging categories: autonomy (93.3% clarity of responsibilities), emotional regulation, and family time. However, the self-perception of “average” performance persists, suggesting that family change requires coordination with institutional pedagogical practices to transcend the domestic sphere. This tension resonates with contemporary debates on social-emotional learning, where the family acts as the primary affective regulator, preventing dropout and grade repetition in middle and high school (Rojas et al., 2024).

The theoretical implications expand the Vygotskian framework toward an ecological perspective, integrating the family microsystem with the school-family mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/2019). In practical terms, they validate experiential strategies over one-way lectures, promoting educational equity in rural regions where domestic violence and labor migration erode parental support.

Conclusions

Following the implementation of the strategy known as “Tejiendo Lazos Familiares” (Weaving Family Ties), it was possible to identify the most common issues in the students’ family environments. The strategy focused on developing skills that foster teamwork and cooperation among adolescents. In addition, the strategy helped promote family involvement in students’ learning process and created opportunities for young people to express their feelings—which are essential for establishing healthy family dynamics. Therefore, it can be concluded that the study’s objectives—

aimed at improving family support in the holistic education of students at the selected school—were achieved.

Furthermore, the workshops also helped strengthen the bonds between families and the school. This study will serve as a model for future research in other contexts facing similar situations, with the strategy adapted to the specific characteristics of the target population.

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