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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SELF-CONCEPT IN PERUVIAN ADOLESCENTS: A DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a fundamental stage in identity formation. This study examines how different dimensions of the school climate influence the development of self-concept among Peruvian adolescents, all within the bioecological framework proposed by Bronfenbrenner. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, 224 students (50% female, 50% male; $M=15.42$ years) from a public school in northern Peru were evaluated in 2025. The School Climate Scale, the Garley Self-Concept Questionnaire, and a sociodemographic questionnaire were administered. A paradox was identified: a moderately adequate school climate ($M=50.98\pm 3.64$) coexists with low levels of self-concept ($M=123.87\pm 20.56$), particularly in the physical and intellectual dimensions. A negative correlation was observed between school climate stability and intellectual self-concept ($r=-0.206$, $p<0.002$), suggesting that overly structured environments may hinder the development of academic identity. Furthermore, gender differences in personal self-assessment favored males ($p=0.01$), reflecting socialization patterns that persist in Latin American contexts. Conclusion: The balance between structure and autonomy emerges as a key element in the development of self-concept during adolescence. Gender differences highlight the importance of considering sociocultural factors in the identity formation process. These findings have significant implications for designing school environments that promote healthy development during this critical stage, particularly in contexts where identity formation is influenced by shifting cultural values.

KEYWORDS: School Climate, Self-Concept, Peruvian Adolescents, Developmental And Contextual Analysis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial stage for identity development, during which factors such as school climate intertwine with maturation processes to form enduring patterns of self-concept (Wong et al., 2021). In collectivist cultures such as that of Peru, where schools often play a more prominent role in socialization than the family, institutional environments may have a unique impact on identity construction during adolescence (Wang et al., 2020). This study explores how different aspects of school climate, such as the quality of relationships, structural stability, and academic expectations, can predict the development of self-concept in specific domains among Peruvian adolescents, offering new insights into cultural variations in developmental trajectories.

Recent studies comparing different cultural contexts indicate that educational settings in Latin America, particularly in Peru, have some distinct characteristics in how they influence adolescent development (Näslund-Hadley & Santos, 2022). While Western educational systems often focus on fostering autonomy and critical thinking, Peruvian schools tend to prioritize structure and discipline (Vallejos et al., 2022). This difference can create a bit of a clash with the natural developmental urge for independence that adolescents experience.

The school environment is a dynamic and complex system where social interactions and pedagogical practices intertwine, shaping the psychological development of students (Delgado & Piña, 2025). Educational psychology provides key theoretical and methodological tools for understanding and improving these processes, adapting them to the specific needs of each educational context (Paz & Peña, 2021). School climate encompasses fundamental aspects such as the quality of relationships between students and teachers, coexistence dynamics, recognition systems, and academic and emotional support mechanisms (Hamodi-Galán & Viego, 2024; Salgado et al., 2023). Research has shown that improving this climate has a positive impact on students' psychological well-being, resilience, and academic performance (Castro, 2025; Panganiban et al., 2025). Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the need to adopt holistic and contextualized approaches to effectively assess and manage school climate, considering its multiple dimensions and the various stakeholders involved, and adapting it to the specific characteristics of each educational community to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability (Díaz et al., 2021; Rubiano & Tafur, 2021).

Self-concept, which can be understood as the way an individual perceives and values themselves, is constructed through social interaction and meaningful experiences (Pineda & Sanchez, 2022; Pulido et al., 2023; Quezada et al., 2023). This has a significant impact on how we value and perceive ourselves (Márquez & Caballero, 2024; Pabago, 2023). During adolescence, this psychological aspect becomes especially crucial, as young people are at a key stage in defining their identity (Carmona, 2022). In this regard, school becomes a fundamental place for this construction, as it is a setting for socialization and learning that offers experiences and support that can either strengthen or weaken the way adolescents see themselves (Bayas, 2022; Carvajal & Gavilanes, 2023; Castro et al., 2021; Orozco, 2025).

This research aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the various elements of school climate and how these influence the formation and evolution of self-concept in adolescents. We acknowledge that this interaction is complex and may have significant implications for the holistic development of young people. Through this study, we seek to enrich the current theoretical framework and provide practical recommendations for improving school environments in a way that promotes healthy self-concept development during this crucial stage of life.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a cross-sectional, correlational design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to examine the relationship between school climate and adolescent self-concept, as well as potential moderating variables. Fieldwork was conducted during the 2025 academic year at a conveniently selected secondary school. The cross-sectional design enabled a snapshot analysis of the variables within the current educational context. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Research Ethics Committee

2.1. Design, Population, And Sample

The target population consisted of 536 students from a Public Educational Institution, located in a populated center in northern Perú. Using a stratified random sampling method by grade and section, a representative sample of 224 adolescents was selected, equally distributed between females (50%) and males (50%), with ages ranging from 13 to 18 years. The distribution by educational levels was fairly uniform: 1st grade (20.1%), 2nd grade (21.4%),

3rd grade (18.3%), 4th grade (22.3%), and 5th grade (17.9%).

The Peruvian context presents a truly compelling opportunity to explore how school climate and self-concept development are intertwined. In this constantly evolving Latin American society, Peru faces a blend of traditional collectivist values and new individualistic influences. This creates a unique environment in which adolescents are actively seeking their identity. The institution we have selected, located in northern Peru, reflects the sociodemographic characteristics typical of urban public institutions in middle-income countries. This allows us to investigate how institutional dynamics affect identity development in contexts with limited resources.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: being officially enrolled in the 2025 academic year, having signed informed consent from parents or legal guardians, and the adolescent's voluntary assent. Students with irregular class attendance (more than 80% absenteeism) were excluded. The study received approval from the Institutional Ethics Committee of a Regional Hospital (CARTA N° 001-2025-CIEI-HGLL), ensuring compliance with ethical principles in research involving minors. The administration of the instruments was carried out by the researchers at the Educational Institution, under standardized conditions.

3. INSTRUMENTS

3.1. School Climate Scale (SCS)

The school climate evaluation was conducted using the School Climate Scale (SCS), an instrument that has been adapted and validated for the educational context in Peru by Gómez (2010). This scale consists of 23 items with a three-point Likert response format (1 = "Never," 2 = "Sometimes," 3 = "Always") that measure nine factors of the educational environment: Involvement, Affiliation, Help, Tasks, Competitiveness, Organization, Clarity, Control, and Innovation. The total score on the ECE allows the school climate to be classified into three categories: poor (23 - 46 points), fair (47 - 58 points), and good (59 - 69 points).

Following the conceptual framework proposed by Moos *et al.* (2000) and considering the limited number of items per factor, these nine factors were reorganized into four main subscales. The Relationships subscale, which includes the factors of Involvement, Affiliation, and Help, is classified as poor (10 - 17 points), fair (18 - 24 points), and good (25 - 30 points). The Self-realization subscale, covering the factors of Tasks and Competitiveness, is

categorized as poor (5 - 8 points), fair (9 - 12 points), and good (13 - 15 points). The Stability subscale, comprising the factors of Organization, Clarity, and Control, is classified as poor (6 - 10 points), fair (11 - 15 points), and good (16 - 18 points). Finally, the Change subscale, focusing solely on the factor of Innovation, is categorized as poor (2 - 3 points), fair (4 - 5 points), and good (6 points).

For this study, the version reporting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.877 for the overall scale was used, a value that supports its psychometric robustness and appropriate internal consistency for evaluating adolescents in educational settings (Gómez, 2010).

3.2. Garley Self-Concept Questionnaire (GSCQ)

To evaluate self-concept, the Garley Self-Concept Questionnaire (GSCQ) was used, an instrument originally developed by García in 2001 in Spain. In this study, the version adapted by Rioja (2016), which has already been used in research with Peruvian adolescents (Ramírez & Ciurlizza, 2021), was applied. This questionnaire has strong psychometric properties and evaluates six key dimensions of self-concept: physical, social, family, intellectual, personal, and sense of control.

The questionnaire consists of 48 items with a 5-point Likert response format, ranging from 1 ("Strongly agree") to 5 ("Strongly disagree"), with intermediate options: 2 ("Agree"), 3 ("Neither agree nor disagree"), and 4 ("Disagree"). The total score of the instrument allows for the classification of self-concept into three levels: low (48-144 points), medium (145-192 points), and high (193-240 points).

Each of the six dimensions, consisting of 8 items each, is classified according to the same scoring criteria: low level (8-19 points), medium level (20-30 points), and high level (31-40 points). These dimensions assess specific aspects such as physical self-concept, social acceptance, family relationships, perception of intellectual abilities, personal self-esteem, and sense of control over one's life.

The overall reliability of the instrument in the version used reached a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.90, demonstrating excellent internal consistency and confirming its suitability for evaluating self-concept in the adolescent population studied (Rioja, 2016).

3.3. Sociodemographic Questionnaire

To collect valuable information about the contextual variables and personal characteristics of the participants, a sociodemographic questionnaire was specifically designed and applied for this study.

This instrument was crucial for obtaining essential data about the adolescents, such as their age, gender, academic grade, number of siblings, and family structure.

Regarding family composition, the following categories were defined: participants who indicated living with both parents were classified as "complete family"; those who reside only with their mother were included in the "living with mother" category; those who live solely with their father were placed in the "living with father" category; and finally, those living alone were categorized as "living alone."

The administration of the questionnaire, as well as the other assessment instruments used in the study, was carried out at the educational institution under standardized conditions, ensuring both the privacy of the participants and a proper understanding of the questions.

3.4. Statistical Analysis

Data was processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The analysis focused on variables related to self-concept, including its various dimensions: physical, social, intellectual, family, and personal aspects, as well as the school climate, particularly the perceived support from teachers and peers.

First off, we calculated descriptive statistics, like means and standard deviations, to give a clear picture of the sample and summarize the key variables. You can find these results neatly organized in tables for easy reference.

Next, we conducted Pearson correlation analyses to explore the relationships between school climate and the different dimensions of self-concept. To dig deeper into predictive relationships, we applied multiple regression models, using global self-concept as the dependent variable. The independent variables included age, gender, school grade, family structure, and indicators of school climate.

We set a significance level of $p < 0.05$ for all inferential tests. The results were interpreted in light of existing literature to emphasize how school climate impacts adolescent self-concept.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics Of The Sample

The study included 224 adolescents with an average age of 15.42 ± 1.11 years. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the participants were 16 years old (35.3%), followed by those who were 15 years old (25.9%). The sample was perfectly balanced in terms of gender, with 50% females and 50% males, and the

different school grades were represented homogeneously, ranging from 17.9% (fifth grade) to 22.3% (fourth grade).

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics And Scale Scores Of The Sample (N = 224).

Sociodemographic Characteristics	
Age (years), Mean \pm SD	15.42 \pm 1.11
Age Distribution, n (%)	
13 years	9 (4.0 %)
14 years	42 (18.8 %)
15 years	58 (25.9 %)
16 years	79 (35.3 %)
17 years	34 (15.2 %)
18 years	2 (0.9 %)
Gender, n (%)	
Female	112 (50.0 %)
Male	112 (50.0 %)
School Grade, n (%)	
First	45 (20.1 %)
Second	48 (21.4 %)
Third	41 (18.3 %)
Fourth	50 (22.3 %)
Fifth	40 (17.9 %)
Family Structure, Mean \pm SD	
Number of siblings	3.57 \pm 1.89
Living Arrangement, n (%)	
Both parents	99 (44.2 %)
Living with mother	74 (33.0 %)
Living with father	24 (10.7 %)
Living alone	27 (12.1 %)
Scale Scores, Mean \pm SD	
School Climate Scale (SCS)	
SCS, total	50.98 \pm 3.64
Relationship's subscale	22.14 \pm 1.87
Self-fulfillment subscale	10.91 \pm 1.49
Stability subscale	13.47 \pm 1.63
Change subscale	4.46 \pm 0.75
Garley's Self-Concept Questionnaire (GSCQ)	
GSCQ, total	123.87 \pm 20.56
Physical self-concept	17.40 \pm 5.74
Social acceptance	23.33 \pm 4.38
Family self-concept	23.25 \pm 3.87
Intellectual self-concept	19.89 \pm 5.81
Personal self-evaluation	19.04 \pm 4.11
Sense of control	20.96 \pm 5.19

Regarding family structure, participants reported an average of 3.57 ± 1.89 siblings, with 53.7% having between 2 and 4 siblings. When analyzing the type of living arrangement, it was found that less than half (44.2%) lived with both parents, while one-third (33.0%) lived only with their mother. Living exclusively with the father (10.7%) or living alone (12.1%) were less common.

4.2. School Climate And Self-Concept Profile

Overall scores on the School Climate Scale (ECE) averaged 50.98 ± 3.64 points (within a possible range of 23–69), placing them in the "average" category (47–58 points). Regarding its dimensions, the Relationships subscale had a mean score of $22.14 \pm$

1.87 (possible range: 10-30), also within the “average” level (18-24 points). The Stability subscale reached 13.47 ± 1.63 points (possible range: 6-18), likewise classified as “average” (11-15 points). The Self-Realization subscale showed a mean value of 10.91 ± 1.49 (possible range: 5-15), corresponding to the “average” level (9-12 points). Lastly, the Change subscale had an average of 4.46 ± 0.75 (possible range: 2-6), also categorized as “average” (4-5 points).

Regarding the Self-Concept Assessment Questionnaire (CAG), the total mean score was 123.87 ± 20.56 (within a possible range of 48 to 240), placing it in the “low” category (48-144 points). Breaking down the specific dimensions (each with a possible range of 8 to 40 points), the highest average scores were recorded in Social Acceptance (23.33 ± 4.38) and Family Self-Concept (23.25 ± 3.87), both within the “moderate” level (20-30 points). The Sense of Control (20.96 ± 5.19) and Intellectual Self-Concept (19.89 ± 5.81) dimensions are right on the borderline between “low” and “moderate” levels. On the other hand, the lowest scores were observed in Personal Self-Evaluation (19.04 ± 4.11) and Physical Self-Concept (17.40 ± 5.74), both classified as “low” (8-19 points).

4.3. Distribution Of Self-Concept And School Climate Dimensions

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage distribution of categories within each evaluated dimension. Regarding self-concept, intellectual self-concept leads with 80.8% of participants falling within the medium level, while family self-concept shows a more balanced distribution between low (45.5%) and medium (52.2%) levels. On the other hand, social acceptance stands out with the highest percentage in the medium level, reaching 75.0%. High levels of self-concept are generally scarce across all dimensions, with the sense of control dimension showing the highest proportion at 6.2%.

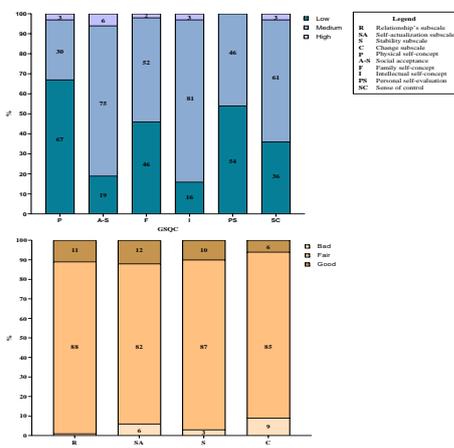


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution Of GSCQ And SCS Dimensions Among Adolescents (N = 224).

As for school climate, the “regular” category is predominant across all dimensions, with percentages ranging from 81.7% (self-fulfillment) to 87.9% (relationships). The “good” category is most represented in the self-fulfillment dimension, with 12.1%, whereas the “poor” category is more common in the change dimension, reaching 9.0%.

4.4. Correlations Between School Climate And Self-Concept

The correlation matrix (Figure 2) reveals complex associations among the dimensions studied. The strongest correlations are found within each construct, indicating internal consistency in both instruments. The relationship between school climate and self-concept is primarily inverse, highlighting a significant negative correlation between the school climate stability subscale and intellectual self-concept ($r = -0.206, p < 0.002$).



Figure 2: Correlation Matrix Between SCS And GSCQ Dimensions Among Adolescents (N = 224).

Within the dimensions of school climate, the strongest correlations are observed between the total score (SCS) and the subscales of relationships ($r = 0.734$), stability ($r = 0.691$), and self-fulfillment ($r = 0.592$). On the other hand, the self-concept dimensions show significant positive intercorrelations, with particularly high values between the total score (CAG) and family self-concept ($r = 0.807$), physical self-concept ($r = 0.792$), and personal self-evaluation ($r = 0.725$).

4.5. Gender Differences In Self-Concept

Table 2 presents a comparison of self-concept dimensions among adolescents, broken down by gender. A statistically significant difference was found in the personal self-evaluation dimension ($p = 0.01$), with males scoring higher (19.81 ± 3.99) compared to females (18.28 ± 4.11). Although they did not reach the conventional threshold for statistical significance, interesting trends were observed in intellectual self-concept ($p = 0.07$) and the total CAG score ($p = 0.06$), both favoring the male group.

Table 2: Comparison Of Self-Concept Dimensions Among Adolescents By Gender (N = 224).

Self-Concept Dimension	Female (n = 112)	Male (n = 112)	p-value
Physical Self-Concept	16.58 ± 6.08	18.21 ± 5.28	0.33
Social Acceptance	23.57 ± 4.57	23.08 ± 4.19	0.40
Family Self-Concept	19.38 ± 6.86	20.40 ± 4.50	0.19
Intellectual Self-Concept	22.79 ± 3.88	23.72 ± 3.81	0.07
Personal Self-Evaluation	18.28 ± 4.11	19.81 ± 3.99	0.01
Sense of Control	20.70 ± 4.68	21.22 ± 5.66	0.45
Total GSCQ	121.29 ± 22.41	126.46 ± 18.26	0.06

Note: Values are presented as Mean ± Standard Deviation. * $p < 0.05$ indicates statistically significant difference.

On the other hand, the dimensions of physical self-concept, social acceptance, family self-concept, and sense of control showed no significant gender differences ($p > 0.05$).

These findings suggest that male adolescents tend to have a more positive personal self-evaluation than their female counterparts, with differences nearing statistical significance also observed in their perceived intellectual abilities and overall self-concept.

5. DISCUSSION

This study delves into the relationship between school climate and the self-concept of Peruvian

adolescents, and what it reveals is quite striking: despite a moderately positive school climate, many adolescents tend to hold a negative view of themselves. This discrepancy suggests that the development of self-concept is influenced by a range of factors beyond the school environment. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, which posits that development during adolescence results from interactions among multiple systems (Wernicke et al., 2025).

A fascinating finding is the inverse relationship between the stability of the school climate and intellectual self-concept. Our regression analyses support this notion, suggesting that overly structured environments may be associated with a less positive academic self-perception (Negrette & Ruiz, 2024). Previous research has shown that environments that strike a balance between structure and autonomy are linked to the development of metacognitive skills and a more optimistic view of one's own abilities (Herrera et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant during middle adolescence, a stage in which the pursuit of autonomy becomes a fundamental psychosocial task (Jiménez et al., 2024).

The gender differences observed, which favor males, are consistent with previous studies and may be interpreted as a reflection of persistent socialization patterns or response biases (Bayas, 2022). These disparities merit attention due to their educational implications, as long-term research has shown that differences in academic self-concept can influence future educational and career choices, potentially contributing to the persistence of gender gaps in STEM fields across Latin America (Cabero-Almenara & Valencia, 2024; García-García & Alzás, 2022).

The family diversity observed in our sample reflects current social changes that are shaping adolescent development (Jiménez et al., 2024). Beyond family structure itself, recent studies indicate that the quality of relationships within the family is what truly matters, as it can moderate how school experiences impact psychological development (Inípe & Vásquez, 2023). The school may be assuming a compensatory role for adolescents coming from diverse family contexts, highlighting the importance of strengthening collaboration between families and schools (Álvarez & Martínez-González, 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, our findings reinforce the notion that self-concept is a multidimensional construct shaped through complex interactions between individual and contextual factors (Mato et al., 2020). The moderate relationship between school climate and self-concept underscores

the need for theoretical models that account for non-linear relationships and moderating variables such as gender, stage of adolescence, and family configuration (Castro et al., 2021; Gutiérrez & Mendoza, 2022).

The practical implications for educational contexts in Latin America include the need to implement targeted programs that strengthen self-concept, particularly in its physical and intellectual dimensions (Jara & Echeverría, 2020). Strategies such as cooperative learning and formative assessment may be key (Herrera et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2020). To address gender differences, it is essential to develop educational interventions that promote balanced self-worth while challenging limiting stereotypes (Schmidt-Behlau, 2021). Regarding school climate, it is crucial to strike a balance between normative structure and the creation of spaces that foster student autonomy and participation (Ariza & Ramos, 2022).

The methodological limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, which makes it difficult to establish causal relationships between school climate and self-concept. Although our analyses reveal significant associations between these variables, we cannot determine whether a positive school climate enhances self-concept or, conversely, whether students with a positive self-concept perceive the school climate more favorably. Despite this limitation, the cross-sectional design we employed allows for an initial exploration of these relationships in the Peruvian context, serving as a foundation for future longitudinal studies. This

approach is appropriate for the descriptive and correlational objectives we pursued, providing an initial look at a phenomenon that has been little studied in this specific population. Other limitations include the focus on a single educational institution, which restricts the generalizability of our findings.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the intricate relationship between school climate and self-concept in Peruvian adolescents. The disparity between a typical school climate and low self-concept levels indicates that other developmental factors are at play. The negative link between the stability of school climate and intellectual self-concept emphasizes the importance of finding a balance between structure and autonomy in educational environments.

Moreover, gender differences in self-assessment reveal the impact of cultural factors on identity development, while family dynamics emerge as a significant contextual element, presenting challenges for schools striving to be supportive spaces.

By providing a contextual perspective within the Latin American framework, the findings underscore the necessity for integrated interventions that not only improve school climate but also bolster self-concept, especially in physical and intellectual areas. Future research should explore the mediating factors through longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to develop effective strategies that promote adolescent well-being and academic success.

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Data Availability Statement: The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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