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Original Research

The Influence of Gender on Early School Dropout

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Abstract: Studies on early school dropout point to the influence of personal, school, and social factors on the intention to continue or leave the educational system, which can sometimes be mediated by a gender-differential socialization. The main objective of this study was to determine if the gender moderator variable influences the determining aspects of premature dropout, and, if so, in what directionality and intensity. To this end, following a systematic literature review, an ad hoc questionnaire was developed, which underwent an exhaustive process of validity and reliability through Delphi method and exploratory factor analysis, prior to the development of a confirmatory factor analysis to verify measurement invariance. The sample consisted of a total of 1,157 Spanish students enrolled in the fourth year of Secondary Education, Learning and Performance Improvement Programs, the first year of a Middle Grade Training Cycle, Basic Vocational Training, Therapeutic-Educational Classrooms, and Socio-Educational Inclusion Classrooms. Data analysis was carried out through a descriptive study, complemented by a multigroup correlational analysis. The results show a lower intention of students of the feminine gender to drop out of studies, coupled with a greater perception of the usefulness of studies and a higher appreciation that the effort required for academic achievement is necessary. However, lower scores are found in the perception of academic efficacy compared to their peers of the masculine gender, despite having higher grades. These results may be explained by the greater need for training among individuals of the feminine gender to access the labor market, better adaptation to the school context, and a gender-differential socialization that influences academic aspects.

Keywords: *Early School Dropout, Gender, School Dropout, School Failure, Co-Education*

Introduction

The Early School Leaving Rate is understood as the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds who have not completed upper secondary education and have not received any type of training in the last four weeks (National Institute of Statistics of Spain 2023). Although reducing this rate is among the main objectives of European structural reform programs and is currently one of the targets set in SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations 2018) it remains a significant educational and social problem in Spain. In 2013, the rate in Spain increased by .6 percent points, reaching an overall 13.9 percent, compared to 9.7 percent in the European Union (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023).

Low academic attainment is linked to negative consequences for both society and individuals, such as increased job instability, decreased employment rates, and higher rates of part-time employment, all of which contribute to the risk of poverty and social exclusion

(European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2019). Regarding physical and mental health, Gumà, Arpino, and Solé-Auró (2019) observe a positive correlation between educational level and healthy preventive care, as well as better management of chronic conditions and more appropriate pharmacological use. Conversely, individuals with low educational levels experience reduced life expectancy, increased incidence of chronic diseases, higher consumption of toxic substances, greater incidence of eating disorders, and a higher likelihood of suffering from anxiety and depression (World Health Organization 2021).

Numerous studies on this topic focus on educational variables that examine school dropout as a structural aspect of educational systems, suggesting that dropout should be explained as the final outcome of a disengagement process with school, closely related to absenteeism and academic failure (Rizo and Hernández-Garcia 2019; Sánchez-Alhambra 2017). However, while acknowledging the effects these factors may have on a student's decision to drop out, other variables pertaining to more individual realms such as social context (Constante-Amores et al. 2021) and family background (Camacho 2018) should not be disregarded.

Nevertheless, considering that school dropout rates are not evenly distributed across different social strata, it is higher in socioeconomically disadvantaged classes, direct effects of any of the aforementioned variables cannot be attributed. Instead, other aspects related to individual identity, such as gender identity, must be considered, contributing to the formulation of life projects that may or may not be linked to academic pursuits.

Despite the numerous studies on early school dropout that include "sex" as a variable in their analysis, research examining these data from a gender perspective is scarce. Such an approach is of great importance, especially considering recent data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics, showing that 16.5 percent of males drop out prematurely compared to 11.2 percent of females (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023). For decades, concerns have existed regarding performance differences between genders, as boys not only drop out of school at higher rates but also constitute 60 percent of those who repeat grades, while girls achieve higher grades and higher exam pass rates (Cerdà-Navarro, Sureda-García, and Salvá-Mut 2020; Ministry of Education and Vocational Training 2023). However, this subsequent achievement does not translate into greater employment opportunities, stability, or access to leadership positions (Rodríguez-Martínez and Blanco-García 2015).

For years, significant research has aimed to explore school relationships considering differences in the construction of girls' and boys' subjectivities, linked to social models and socio-labor stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, largely influenced by marked gender-differential socialization (Suberviola 2020a). Various explanations have been proposed to understand differences in academic outcomes between students of the masculine and feminine gender. Some are associated with girls' greater adaptation to the school culture, as they are perceived as more compliant, obedient to authority, and better suited to the discipline required in educational institutions (Fernández-Enguita 2009; Fernández-Mellizo

and Martínez-García 2017). Other studies point to differences in attitudes toward school, teachers, schoolwork, and learning between boys and girls, highlighting the strength of subjectivity and the role played by the construction of masculinity and femininity among adolescents (Sáinz et al. 2021; Salas-Rodríguez et al. 2022). In this regard, numerous studies explore the relationships between gender construction and the experience of schoolwork, where the structures of the education system develop gender-related values linked to academic life and decision-making in that context (Jiménez-Quenguan and Galeano 2020; Sierra-Nieto 2013). Within this differential gender socialization, the school is undoubtedly one of the most influential agents, transmitting sexualized social roles through the hidden curriculum that impact dropout intentions (Gómez-Carrasco and Gallego-Herrera 2016; Suberviola 2012; Valenzuela-Valenzuela and Cartes-Velásquez 2020).

In addition to studies on gender and its relationship with education, other research indicates a connection between personal satisfaction and the school experience, with this sentiment linked to continued education at higher levels (Valdés, Coll, and Falsafi 2016). Studies suggest that girls report enjoying learning more than boys and that this enjoyment is related to establishing better relationships with teachers, positive peer socialization, and support received in personal learning (See and Gorard 2015; Suberviola 2020b). Regarding academic goals, girls demonstrate greater intrinsic motivational orientation than boys, and they value education more for its own sake rather than solely as a career path (Navarro-Roldan 2016; Usán and Salavera 2018). Overall, girls have a positive self-concept, defining themselves as hardworking, responsible, and good companions (Blanco-García and Rodríguez-Martínez 2015). Some studies suggest that another reason girls may show a greater intention to continue their studies is the support of mothers, who, even with limited academic backgrounds, consider it essential for their daughters to continue their education beyond compulsory schooling, expressing high aspirations for them academically (García-Gómez et al. 2009), an idea further supported by de Marcenaro's study (2010), which highlights high intergenerational mobility among daughters compared to their mothers.

In contrast, students of the masculine gender in secondary education often avoid appearing diligent as a strategy to gain peer acceptance, more frequently creating climates of defiance toward rules and school discipline, aiming to achieve a leadership position that is contrary to academic success but linked to masculine dominance (Beltrán and Devís 2019; Holden 2002). Behind these attitudes toward school exhibited by adolescents of the masculine gender lies a differential emotional gender socialization that steers adolescents of the masculine gender toward more antisocial and less emotional behaviors (Suberviola 2020a).

The study presented herein investigates students' intentions regarding continuation/dropout of studies after completing compulsory education from a gender perspective, considering how this factor influences the determining dimensions of early school dropout.

Objective

The purpose of the study is to analyze the influence of gender on the underlying causes of early school dropout. From this goal, several specific objectives are derived, including:

- Analyze the influence of gender on students' expectations regarding the educational system.
- Examine the different perceptions of students of masculine and feminine genders regarding the effort expectations involved in continuing studies after compulsory education.
- From a gender perspective, to investigate how the influence of context affects the continuation or dropout of academic studies.
- Analyze the different perceptions presented by genders regarding school context resources.

Method

The research design consists of a nonexperimental correlational study that will allow us to determine a predictive model supported by quantitative measurements of various variables.

Study Model

In order to analyze the dimensions behind the intention to drop out of school prematurely, the proposed study model is rooted in two assumptions. First, an exhaustive and systematic literature review on the influencing factors in the intention of early school dropout, and second, an analysis of the main explanatory theories of human behavior. Taking into account the aspects and conclusions gathered in both analyses, an explanatory pattern of the intention to drop out of studies prematurely is constructed, including the main factors of incidence of the phenomenon analyzed from the gender moderator variable (Suberviola 2021).

The dimension of *educational system expectations* refers to both the appreciation of the usefulness of the goal to be achieved and the individual's perception of their chances of success in relation to that objective, i.e., obtaining a post-compulsory qualification. This dimension consists of two factors: perception of the usefulness of studies, which refers to the students' appreciation of the profitability of obtaining a qualification after compulsory education, and the perception of efficacy in the school environment, referring to the students' perceptions of their abilities and expectations regarding their chances of acquiring an official qualification (Table 2).

The dimension of *effort expectations* refers to the student's perception of the degree of effort required to obtain an official qualification in the years following the attainment of compulsory education. This dimension is disaggregated into two factors: the overall perception of effort to be made, which refers to the student's appreciation of the magnitude

and intensity of effort required to obtain, through the regulated education system, a post-compulsory qualification, and the relative perception of effort to be made, which is directly associated with the student's appreciation of the sacrifice for achieving the goal. However, it differs from the overall perception in that the perception of effort is relative to the student's opinion on the benefits and possibilities of individual and socio-labor improvements that obtaining a qualification will provide (Table 2).

The *context influence* dimension refers to the degree to which influential people and groups for the individual consider that they should continue education beyond compulsory schooling through the regulated school system. Within this dimension are the factors of social influence in decision-making, referring to the degree of influence that society in general and significant people or groups for the student would have on the adolescent's decision to continue or drop out of studies, and the *socio-family context factor*, which is the physical or symbolic environment in which the student finds themselves at the time of decision-making. These factors encompass a set of phenomena, situations, and circumstances that surround or condition the intention to continue with regulated studies (Table 2).

The last dimension, termed *school context resources*, is directly associated with educational factors. This dimension comprises three factors: functional resources in the school context, encompassing variables that guide patterns and regulate actions, such as governing bodies, classroom atmosphere, schedules, evaluation systems, and proposed extracurricular activities; material resources in the school context, including space, furniture, and didactic materials; and human resources in the school context, linked to the human capital within the school system, including students, teaching staff, administrative personnel, guidance teams, other educational agents, families, and administrative and service personnel (Table 2).

As observed in the study conducted by Venkatesh et al. (2003), this analysis model shows great consistency in analyzing human behavior, specifically in the intentionality of early school dropout (Suberviola, Navaridas, and González-Marcos 2024).

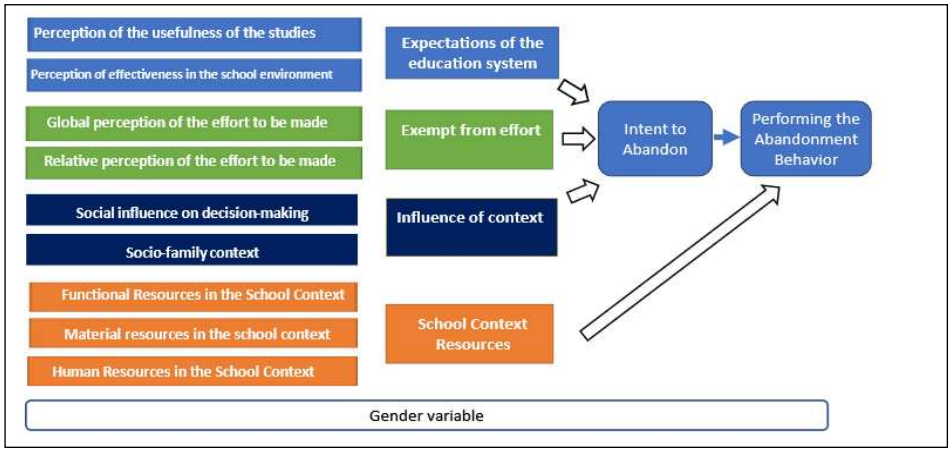

Figure 1: Early School Dropout Analysis Model from the Gender Variable

Once the model and research method have been configured, and prior to the instrument's application, it was submitted to the university's ethics committee and obtained favorable opinion. The entire process was conducted in accordance with the ethical code proposed by the Committee on Publications Ethics and by Estalella (2022), specific to socio-educational research involving minors.

Population and Sample

The study population for this research consists of 6,131 students from La Rioja (Spain), who were enrolled in one of the following courses or educational programs between the months of April and June of 2021: fourth year of compulsory Secondary Education (CSE, academic and applied modalities), second year of the Program for Learning and Performance Improvement (PLPI2), first and second years of Basic Vocational Training (BVT) in any of its families, and first year of Middle Grade Vocational Training (MGVT) in any of its families, therapeutic-educational classrooms (TEC), and Socio-Educational Inclusion Classrooms (SEIC).

The collected sample comprised 1,157 students, which, with a PQ = .90 and a 95 percent confidence level, yields a 1.6 percent error—parameters deemed acceptable in socio-educational studies (López-Roldán and Fachelli 2015).

In Table 1, specific characteristics of the sample can be observed. It should be noted that, in the item regarding gender, participants were asked about their gender identity, not their biological sex, as this study aims to analyze the implications of gender perspective on early school dropout. Individuals who did not identify as masculine gender or feminine gender were instructed to select the "other" option.

Table 1: Description of the Sample by Gender, Age, and Academic Year

	Characteristic	*Number (n = 1,157)*	*Percentage*
Gender	Masculine	569	49.18
	Feminine	557	48.14
	Other	31	2.68
Age (years)	14	25	2.16
	15	355	30.68
	16	457	39.50
	17	193	16.68
	18	72	6.22
	>18	55	4.75

Academic Year	4º CSE (academic)	463	40.02
	4º CSE (technological)	210	18.15
	BVT	172	14.87
	MGVT	173	14.95
	PLPI2	121	10.46
	SEIC	10	.86
	TEC	8	.69

In Table 2, it can be observed that there is a balance between genders in the sample; however, the majority of students fall within the age range of 15 to 17 years.

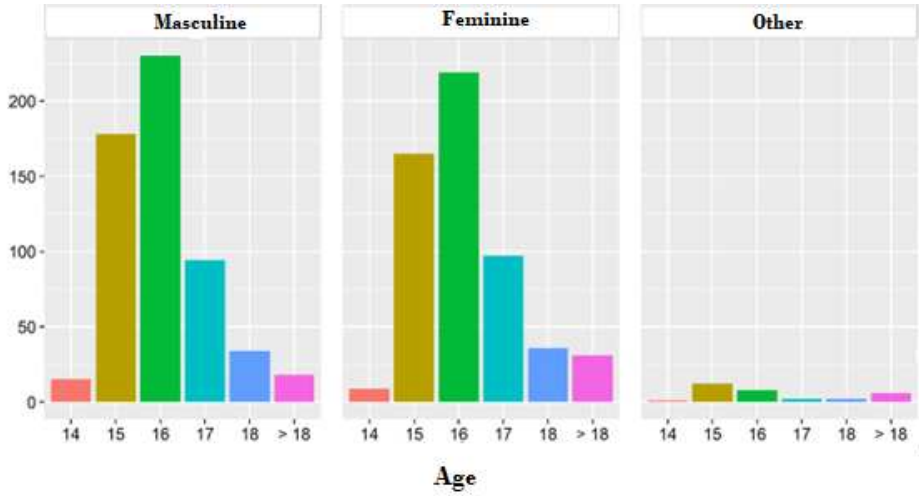

Figure 2: Distribution of the Sample by Age/Gender

Instrument and Application

After conducting an exhaustive literature review on the dimensions and factors influencing early school dropout, as outlined in previous sections, a data collection instrument was developed. In this case, it is a questionnaire developed ad hoc, the Early School Dropout Questionnaire, consisting of a total of 40 items. For each item, students were required to respond on a five-point Likert scale (with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), which was carried out between late April and early June of the academic year 2020/2021.

Contact with schools was made through the Directorate General of Educational Innovation. The first step was sending an informative letter detailing the project and requesting collaboration in disseminating the questionnaire to educational institutions through the application managed by the Ministry of Education. The link to the questionnaire, developed using the Limesurvey tool, was distributed to the mentioned courses and

educational programs. The full instrument can be accessed in Suberviola (2023). The schools that chose to participate in the study voluntarily sent families a letter of consent for participation, which they were required to sign and return.

In Table 2, the questionnaire structure and the dimensions and factors included therein can be observed.

Table 2: Description of Study Dimensions and Factors

Dimensions	*Factors*	*Acronym*	*Variables*
Educational System Expectations	Perception of the usefulness of studies	UTL	Career development
			Personal development
			Social development
	Perception of efficacy in the academic environment	AUT	Capacity
			Academic competencies
			Perseverance
Effort Expectations	Global perception of effort to be exerted	FACG	Global effort perception
	Relative perception of effort to be exerted	FACR	Relative effort perception
Context Influence	Social influence on decision-making	NSUB	Family influence
			Peer influence
			Social influence
	Socio-Familial Context	CONT	Educational climate
			Labor market opportunities
			Neighborhood area
School Context Resources	Functional resources in the school context	RRFF	Organization-planning
			Evaluation
			Curricular rigidity
			Information
	Material resources in the school context	RRMM	Infrastructure
			Teaching materials
	Human resources in the school context	RRHH	Teaching staff
			Students
			Management team
Early School Dropout Intention		INT	Intention to drop out of studies

In order to determine content validity, the questionnaire underwent a thorough inter-raters process using an adaptation of the Delphi method developed in three fundamental phases: preliminary, exploratory, and final (Cabero Almenara and Infante Moro 2014). Once this process was completed, a pilot test was conducted with representative students from our

study sample to obtain information on the difficulty, comprehensibility, format, and presentation of the questionnaire, among other aspects. Subsequently, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to verify the purity of the measurement items using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test (Kaiser 1970) and Bartlett's sphericity test (1950). The KMO test, with a value of .91 labeled as "excellent" according to Kaiser (1974), confirms the adequacy of the sample for analysis. Regarding the individual values for items, all are above the acceptable threshold of .5. In Bartlett's sphericity test (1950), the obtained values, χ^2 (780) = 14,215.52, p < .001, confirm that the correlation matrix is significantly different from the identity matrix.

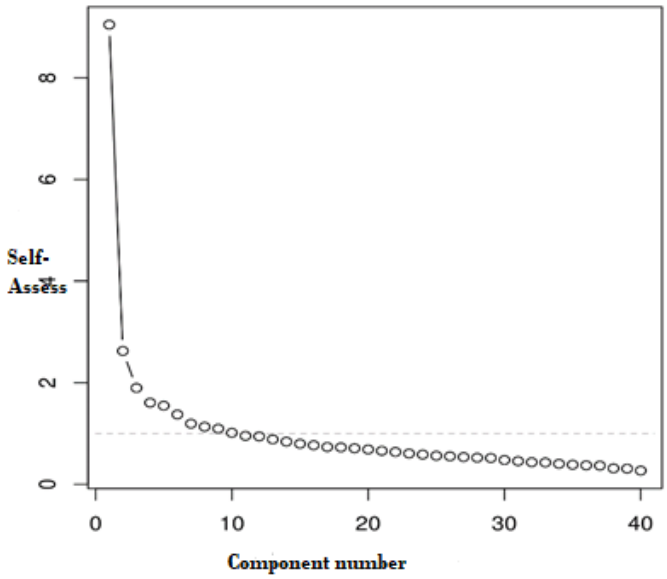

Figure 3: Screen Plot of the Principal Component Analysis Conducted

Subsequently, the analysis proceeds to estimate the factors or number of factors to be extracted. For this purpose, principal component analysis (PCA) is utilized, considering an orthogonal rotation (varimax). In Figure 3, it can be observed that the inflection point occurs between seven and eight factors, explaining 51 percent of the total variance. Moreover, considering that the first ten factors have eigenvalues greater than 1 (latent root criterion), it seems reasonable to assume that there are ten factors in the dataset explaining 56.34 percent of the total variance. It should be noted that in social sciences, a solution representing total variance below 50 percent is typically considered satisfactory in some cases (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Data Analysis and Treatment

The data analysis was conducted using two complementary methodologies. The first one involved a percentage-based descriptive analysis, enabling an initial visual approach to the

results. This study was complemented by a multigroup correlational analysis. Both studies were carried out using various statistical procedures implemented in R Core Team (2021).

Descriptive Analysis

The first analysis conducted is purely descriptive, showing the percentage of each response in the different items. We analyze how responses to items related to dropout intention vary according to the moderating variable gender. This allows us to study possible differences in responses between different genders. Graphical representation of response distribution in each category and its probability density is employed for this purpose.

Multigroup Correlational Analysis

To analyze potential differences between different groups of interest, it is essential to confirm if there is factorial invariance based on each group. Thus, a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis is performed. If measurement invariance is confirmed, variable means are compared. Measurement invariance is considered acceptable if, first, model plausibility is confirmed for each group considered, and sequentially, configuration invariance, weak or metric invariance, and strong or scalar invariance are satisfied (Dimitrov 2010). Configuration invariance is evaluated through overall model fit, while metric and scalar invariances are assessed progressively by comparing two nested models that are identical, except for the set of constraints added in one of them. Evaluation criteria include changes in CFI (ΔCFI), RMSEA (ΔRMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (ΔSRMR). Following criteria proposed by Cheung and Rensvold (2002) and Chen (2007), a change of.01 in CFI is considered acceptable. If the difference in CFI between two nested models exceeds.01 in favor of the less restrictive model, the model with more constraints should be rejected. Additionally, thresholds suggested by Chen (2007) for changes in RMSEA and SRMR are considered: variations of RMSEA (ΔRMSEA) ≤ .015 and SRMR (ΔSRMR) ≤ .030 for metric invariance, and .010 for scalar invariance, are adequate to accept invariance.

Results

This section presents the main findings obtained from the different techniques employed in the study. First, the percentages of responses given by different genders regarding dropout intention are displayed. Second, the significance of the differences found for each studied factor is analyzed.

Gender Impact on Early School Dropout Intention: A Descriptive Analysis

A higher number of individuals of the feminine gender express an intention to continue studying in the following school years, specifically 75 percent of students of feminine gender

compared to 50 percent of students of the masculine gender. On the other hand, 50 percent of individuals of the feminine gender affirm the intention to not drop out of school even if they could do so without negative consequences, in contrast to a mere 25 percent of persons of the masculine gender who state they would continue studying under such conditions. The following figure depicts the violin plots generated from the responses provided by the surveyed students.

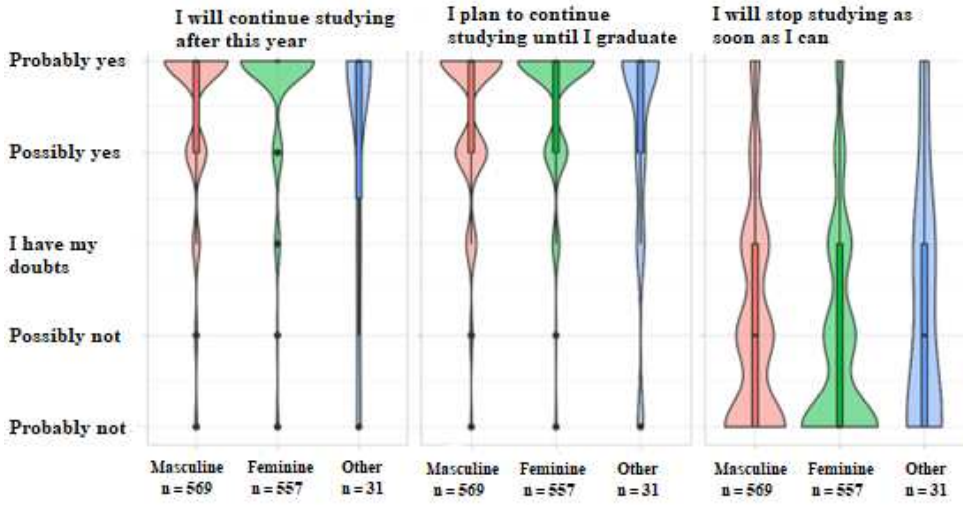

Figure 4: Violin Plot of Gender vs. Dropout Intention

Multigroup Correlational Analysis of the Gender Variable

Given that, as shown in Table 3, the goodness-of-fit of the model is confirmed for each of the two genders considered (masculine and feminine), we proceed to check for invariances.

Table 3: Goodness-of-Fit Indices for SEM Models Obtained by Gender

Group	*SRMR*	*RMSEA (IC 90%)*	*CFI*	*TLI*	*PNFI*	χ^2/gl
Masculine	.048	.038 (.033, .042)	.927	.918	.746	1.69
Feminine	.047	.037 (.032, .042)	.942	.934	.768	1.66

IC, confidence interval; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SEM, structural equation modeling; SRMR, standardized root means square residual.

N = 1,126; group "masculine" *n* = 569; group "feminine" *n* = 557.

Thus, Table 4 presents the nested model comparison of the obtained invariance models. In addition to the degrees of freedom for each model, it includes the χ^2 statistic value, the χ^2/df ratio, the goodness-of-fit indices CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR, the model being compared,

the difference in these fit indices, and whether, based on the model fit and observed differences, invariance can be accepted or not.

Table 4: Results of Intergroup Invariance Analysis According to the Gender Variable

	Config.	*First-Order Metric*	*First- and Second-Order Metric*	*First-Order Scalar*	*Partial First-Order Scalar*	*First- and Second-Order Scalar*
Gl	936	959	964	977	976	983
χ^2	1,569.74	1,589.87	1,595.85	1,715.16	1,650.62	1,751.11
χ^2/gl	1.68	1.66	1.66	1.75	1.69	1.78
CFI	.935	.935	.935	.924	.930	.921
RMSEA	.037	.037	.037	.040	.038	.040
SRMR	.046	.048	.048	.050	.049	.051
Compared Mode	–	1	2	3	3	4a
ΔCFI	–	0	0	–.011	–.005	–.009
ΔRMSEA	–	–.001	0	.003	.001	.002
ΔSRMR	–	.002	.001	.002	.001	.002
Decision	–	Accept	Accept	Reject	Accept	Accept

gl, degrees of freedom; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual.
N = 1,126; group "masculine" *n* = 569; group "feminine" *n* = 557.

From the results obtained, it is observed that the equality constraints imposed by the first-order metric invariance test (model 2) do not affect the model fit relative to the configuration solution (model 1), suggesting that the hypothesis of intergroup equality of first-order factor loadings is plausible. Similarly, it is possible to confirm the invariance of the second-order factor loadings (model 3 vs. model 2). However, the observed change in the CFI fit index exceeds the established threshold when comparing models 4 (first-order scalar invariance) and 3 (first- and second-order metric invariance), suggesting that the constructs have not been defined by similar measurement models. Nevertheless, it is possible to conduct a group comparison if there is partial measurement invariance, meaning that the freely estimated parameters do not exceed 20 percent (Byrne, Shavelson, and Muthén 1989).

In both Figure 5 and Table 5, which display the mean differences of the latent variables along with effect size, it can be observed that, overall, scores given by individuals of feminine gender are slightly higher than those of persons of the masculine gender, except in the case of perception of efficacy in the school environment and intention to drop out. However, significant differences are found only in the perception of the utility of studies, perception relative to the effort to be made, social influence in decision-making, and functional resources

in the school context, all with a positive directionality toward individuals of the feminine gender. However, in the factor of perception of self-efficacy in the school environment, where significant differences are also obtained, it is students of the masculine gender who score higher. In contrast, in the variable intention to drop out, surveyed women present lower scores with significant difference compared to their individuals of the masculine gender counterparts.

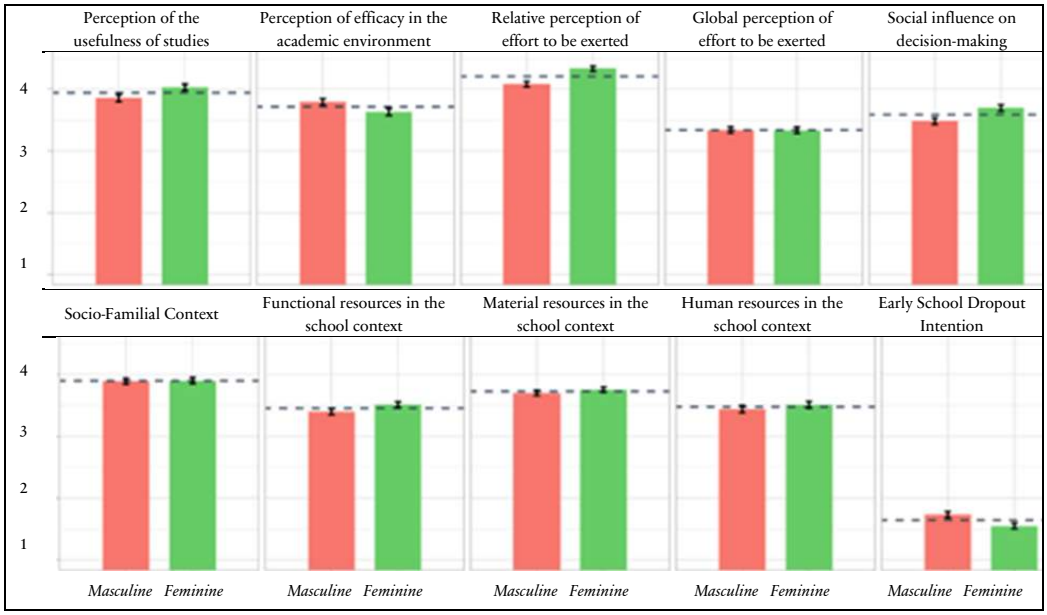

Figure 5: Mean Value of Each First-Order Factor by Gender

Notes: The dashed line represents the overall mean value of each construct.
Median ± 95% CI.

Table 5: Mean Differences of First-Order Factor Scores by Gender

Latent Variable	*Gender (Mean ± DE)*		*Difference between Groups*		
	Masculine (G1) n = 559	*Feminine (G2) n = 557*	*Mean (G2–G1) (IC 95%)*	*P*	*d Cohen (IC 95%)*
Perception of Utility of Studies	3.85 ± 1.18	4.03 ± 1.07	.200 (.09, .31)	<.001***	.159 (.09, .23)
Perception of Self-Efficacy in School Setting	3.80 ± 1.01	3.63 ± 1.15	−.114 (−.19, −.04)	.004**	−.154 (−.22, −.09)
Relative Perception of Effort	4.08 ± .96	4.34 ± .81	.265 (.17, .36)	< .001***	.284 (.22, .35)
Global Perception of Effort	3.34 ± 1.07	3.34 ± 1.07	.005 (−.09, .11)	.916	−.007 (−.07, .06)

Latent Variable	*Gender (Mean ± DE)*		*Difference between Groups*		
	Masculine (G1) n = 559	*Feminine (G2) n = 557*	*Mean (G2–G1) (IC 95%)*	*P*	*d Cohen (IC 95%)*
Social Influence on Decision-Making	3.48 ± 1.10	3.70 ± 1.08	.155 (.1, .21)	< .001***	.196 (.13, .26)
Socio-Familial Context	3.89 ± 1.00	3.90 ± 1.05	.023 (−.08, .13)	.668	.009 (−.06, .08)
Functional Resources in School Context	3.40 ± 1.15	3.51 ± 1.09	.118 (.04, .20)	.005**	.103 (.04, .16)
Material Resources in School Context	3.70 ± 1.02	3.75 ± .98	.053 (−.03, .14)	.220	.053 (−.01, .11)
Human Resources in School Context	3.44 ± 1.21	3.51 ± 1.14	.052 (−.4, .14)	.247	.058 (−.01, 013)
Intention to Dropout	1.73 ± 1.02	1.55 ± .95	−.190 (−.28, −.10)	< .001***	−.189 (−.26, −.12)

SD: Standard Deviation, CI: Confidence Interval

** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6: Results of the Gender-Based Structural Model Equivalence Analysis

Invariant Model		
	Partial Scalar First and Second Order	*Full Structural Model*
Gl	983	1,018
χ^2	1,751.11	1,805.33
$\Delta\chi^2/gl$	1.78	1.77
CFI	.921	.918
RMSEA	.040	.040
SRMR	.051	.056
Model compared	–	5
ΔCFI	–	–.003
ΔRMSEA	–	0
ΔSRMR	–	.005
Decision	–	Accept

gl, degrees of freedom.

N = 1,126; group "masculine" *n* = 569; group "feminine" *n* = 557.

Conclusions and Discussion

The results found in the study provide a deeper understanding of the influence that gender presents in various factors that impact early school dropout, potentially altering its directionality and intensity, and not merely remaining in a statistical analysis regarding biological sex.

The scores obtained reveal a highly significant difference between the masculine and feminine genders, with individuals of the masculine gender expressing a greater intention to drop out of studies. These data support other research on early school dropout rates that suggest gender can be considered a predictive characteristic of study abandonment (Choi de Mendizabal and Calero Martínez 2013; Rizo-Areas and Hernández-García 2019; Rodríguez-Pineda and Zamora 2021; Sánchez-Alhambra 2017; Santana, Ruiz-Alfonso, and Feliciano 2023).

Certainly, the research data may have multiple explanations. One significant factor could be the perception among women that earning a degree improves their access to employment, secures higher-paying jobs, and enhances social status. These factors are closely tied to the perceived value of education. Conversely, lacking a degree will complicate their future job prospects to a greater extent than their counterparts of the masculine gender, relegating them to a precarious job market, often outside regulated hiring. In this regard, they are correct, as data provided by the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (2019) show that at the same level of education, women have lower salary levels and fewer positions of responsibility. Women are more prevalent in service, health, and education sectors, administrative positions, and occupations that do not require qualifications. However, within the same range of educational levels, predominantly feminine professions have lower average salaries than others, indicating that occupational segregation also contributes to increasing wage gaps between men and women.

Another factor explaining the lower intention to abandon studies among persons of the feminine gender is a greater capacity for effort. They affirm that despite the perception of difficulty and dedication required to obtain a post-obligatory degree, the sacrifice is worth it—aspects related to the relative perception of effort to be made. The data obtained align with findings from studies by Delgado et al. (2010), See and Gorard (2015), Valdés, Coll, and Falsafi (2016), Torrano and Soria (2017), and Navarro-Roldán (2016) that analyzed the role of gender in academic goals, finding that girls had significantly higher learning goal orientations than boys. In this sense, it must be considered that motivation toward achievement represents a powerful attitude against school dropout (Becerra-González and Reidl-Martínez 2015; Santana, Ruiz-Alfonso, and Feliciano 2023).

The study's results show that individuals of the feminine gender score significantly higher on the factor of social influence on decision-making. This suggests that surveyed adolescent girls place more importance on what their family and friends might think regarding their academic history and continuing studies to obtain a post-obligatory degree. These findings corroborate other studies such as Etchezahar (2014) and Suberviola (2020b), which affirm that the persons of the feminine gender consider social norms and the opinions of people around them more in shaping their personality, thus mediating their actions. As previously noted, social influence on decision-making is directly related to the intention to drop out of studies, suggesting that part of girls' intention to continue studying may be explained by pressure from those close to them, as stated in studies such as García-Gómez,

Padilla Carmona, and Suarez-Ortega (2009) and Marcenaro (2010), or García-Gómez, Padilla Carmona, and Suarez-Ortega (2009), which concludes the higher academic expectations mothers have for their daughters, and to a lesser extent, for their sons.

Similarly, research by Fernández-Mellizo and Martínez-García (2017), Usán and Salavera (2018), and Bayón-Calvo, Lucas-García, and Gómez-García (2021) argues that girls are socialized into norms, behavior patterns, and attitudes better suited to the educational context. This is one of the reasons explaining why early school dropout rates and many educational indicators are lower for women than for men. However, as previously noted, this advantage seems insufficient to counterbalance the sexism of the job market, where horizontal segregation, wage gaps, or the glass ceiling mark women's reality.

Another aspect found in the study is that girls significantly score higher on the functional resources in the school context factor, which includes variables related to learning strategies. Since this factor refers to the organization of school time, completion of homework, and exam preparation, it can be said that adolescent girls have better organizational and study strategies and make better use of functional resources. This confirms studies such as Navarro Soria, González-Gómez, and Real Fernádez (2018), which found similar results in university students analyzed with the ACRA Learning Strategies Scale (Román and Gallego 2001). However, this trend is not observed in other Spanish-speaking countries, with boys showing higher academic competencies combined with better study strategies, as indicated by the study conducted by Gómez-Esquivel et al. (2021) in Colombia or by Sepúlveda et al. (2011) in Chile. These data can possibly be explained, as Cárcamo, Moreno, and Barrio (2020) point out, by the influence of gender stereotypes in these countries regarding the social and labor roles that different genders fulfill. In many of these countries, females are predominantly associated with traditional roles, in which they perform tasks related to household chores or caregiving that do not require specific qualifications.

Finally, it is very interesting to analyze the data obtained regarding the perception of efficacy in the school environment factor, in which boys consider themselves more efficacious than girls, except when asked about study techniques, where girls claim to use them more than boys. In line with this, results from other research also point to boys' greater sense of competence (Britner and Pajares 2006; Usher and Pajares 2008). However, these findings must be nuanced by others, such as those presented by Pintrich and Zusho (2002), which show that despite girls expressing lower academic self-efficacy than boys, they use more learning strategies. One of the reasons cited to explain this discrepancy or lack of relationship between girls' self-efficacy beliefs and their use of strategies is related to how they respond to questionnaires used to assess self-efficacy, as it has been found that while boys tend to be more self-aggrandizing in their responses, girls tend to be more modest (Schunk and Pajares 2012; Oikonomidoy and Karam 2023). On the other hand, girls calibrate and evaluate their self-beliefs more accurately and realistically, showing greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and making greater use of strategies to compensate for their difficulties and shortcomings in certain areas or

activities, thus improving their academic performance (Pintrich and Zusho 2002). However, the reason that best explains the scores obtained is that they undervalue themselves despite achieving higher grades, especially in technical subjects, and this fact is mediated by how gender roles have conditioned their academic choices (Sáinz and Müller 2018).

In conclusion, it can be stated that gender constitutes a determining factor in dropout rates in the educational system; however, it should be qualified that it is precisely the construction of gender identity that mediates these results, with aspects such as better adaptation to the norms and academic rules presented by adolescents of the feminine gender, the need to enter a sexist job market where there are different possibilities depending on the gender you belong to, or the greater capacity for effort and responsibility that they exhibit.

In order to reduce the early school dropout rate, it is important for socio-educational agents to be aware of the influencing variables so that a particular student decides to drop out of school prematurely and how these factors are mediated by a differential gender socialization, since from the perspective of education for equality, proactive actions can and should be taken to reduce the effect produced by potential threatening factors, thus preventing future early school dropout. In this regard, co-education programs should be introduced from the perspective of a higher risk of early school dropout among male students, being aware of the factors influencing this. This co-education should have a compensatory and individualized nature, considering each person's gender and addressing the shortcomings that both the formal education system and nonformal education may have had for each gender.

Due to the importance of the issue of early school dropout, future lines of research are proposed that could be of interest. One of them would be to analyze the influence that COVID-19 may have had on the intention to drop out, comparing the findings with the data from subsequent years on this phenomenon.

Another line of research would refer to the sample, expanding it both at the national level, covering other autonomous communities, and at the international level.

It would also be of great interest to complement this study with another of a qualitative nature, such as conducting focus groups or in-depth interviews with students of different gender identities. This approach would allow us to better understand nonbinary gender groups, which are more challenging to evaluate quantitatively due to the inconsistency of results from a limited sample size.

The final proposed line of research is to conduct a similar study, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with samples from teachers and families. This would allow us to triangulate the results obtained in the study.

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Informed Consent

The author obtained approval from the ethics committee of their university, as well as consent from the families of the participants, as they were minors.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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