Reflexivity and Academic Success: The Impact of Attributions and Emotions in Spanish Students

di *Fabiana Coluzzi, Graziella Falcone*

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the relationships between CAS, PE, and AP among university students from a reflexive perspective regarding academic outcomes. A sample of 200 undergraduate students from an Italian public university was assessed concerning CAS, PE, and self-reported AP through validated questionnaires. The data showed a highly positive correlation between CAS and PE, as well as between PE and AP, indicating that the students in this sample exhibit higher positive emotional levels, which they attribute to controllable factors. These, in turn, positively affect their academic performance. The results of the mediation analysis support the claim that positive emotions are real mediators in the relation between CAS and AP. These results highlight the effects of this factor on and within higher education, emphasising the importance of self-reflection and intrinsic motivation in enabling students to become owners of their learning. According to the study, immense awareness is fostered among educational bodies to ensure that learners' emotional states are addressed, with specific regard to bullying and its social workings. In this manner, inclusive and supportive learning environments become enabled through the embedding of reflective practices in the curriculum, which consequently heightens academic achievement. This undertaking adds to the body of knowledge and provides realisable, actionable perceptions of how student outcomes can be enhanced in higher education settings.

Keywords: controllable attributions of success (CAS), positive emotion (PE), academic performance (AP), reflexivity, higher education.

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Introduction[1]

In the provision of higher education, the pursuit of academic excellence has grown more elaborate and varied. Universities are working on developing student success with a climate that supports reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity, or the ability to reflect on experiences, ideas, and actions, holds significant theoretical potential in the development of inclusive, empowering learning environments that prioritise student well-being. This paper aims to explore the potential complex relationships between controllable attribution of success (CAS), positive emotions (PE), and academic performance (AP), as these factors have deep connections of interrelatedness and can significantly impact educational outcomes for university students.

The role of self-reflection in any educational setting is crucial. As Yancey (1998) has said, "If we don't ask our students to reflect on their work—process based on internal factors and criteria, they are likely to remain dependent on external rewards, not knowing where to begin to consider their performance" (p. 14). This should integrate reflective practices into the pedagogical framework of higher education because self-reflection enables students to understand how they learn, identify areas for improvement, and take the initiative in their academic journeys. Moreover, a reflective culture fosters intrinsic motivation, enabling students to persevere with determination beyond mere external rewards.

The role educators play in facilitating reflective practice is of utmost importance. According to the assertive opinion of Yost et al. (2000), quality teaching is associated with critical reflection. It is assumed that the power of reflection can significantly change how students perceive their work and motivation in studies. The other purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between CAS, PE, and AP among university students. To be specific, it will explore how controllable attributions influence positive feelings and how these feelings, in turn, impact the effect of attributions on academic performance. The results will be helpful for individuals who are willing to improve student outcomes in higher education and should act upon the findings presented in this paper.

To emphasise what these findings imply, one needs to be familiar with the effects of bullying and social relationships in higher education premises. Bullying is often repeated aggressive behaviour that can be harmful or threatening, making it detrimental to the emotional welfare and eventually to the academic achievement of the students. These findings gave evidence that

[1] FC is the author of paragraph 1, 2, and GF is the author of paragraph 3, 4 and paragraph.

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bullying, in terms of victimisation or perpetration, is associated with the attenuation of positive emotions among students (Ragusa et al.2023). Hence, the relationship between reflection, controllable attributions, and positive emotions has to be taken into account to manage the menace caused by bullying and cultivate a favourable academic environment.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between controllable attributions of success, positive emotions, and academic performance among university students. An attempt is made to enable the reader to appreciate how consideration and self-thoughtfulness in learning can help an educator develop a practice that produces an inclusive and empowering effect. Another subsequent review of the literature that will follow is purposively directed towards the theoretical locus concerning the pedagogy of reflection, marking its historical growth, definitions, and applications that can bear fruit, and threading into the practice of teaching. The purpose is to demonstrate how reflective practices can lead to transformation in enhancing academic motivation and, consequently, academic performance, thereby equipping students with tools for success in both their educational and professional pursuits.

Literature Analysis

The concept of reflection in education originates from settings outside the traditional classroom but has gained respect through research in various professions. Broadening the relationship between CAS, PE, and AP requires an insight into some broader theoretical aspects of reflexivity within education. Reflective thinking has become a part of curricular integration, emanating from far beyond the realms of traditional academics. Research in various professions, such as nursing, has demonstrated the importance of reflection as a learning strategy that impacts the educational outcome through elements like academic self-concept and task awareness (Mountford & Rogers, 1996). All these striking basics can be equally well applied in higher education for no better reason than increased consciousness and access to more experience upon which to reflect. Explicit instruction in metacognitive strategies, such as self-evaluation, has been linked to increased student engagement in their academic work and improved academic performance (Cavilla, 2017). The results of this study do not limit the students' power only to evaluate their work, but to check the perceived effort and quality of work done. This research aims to utilise reflection as a metacognitive tool to enhance academic motivation and performance among university students.

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For example, Ramzan and Fatim (2023) in their study on the utility of reflection as a learning strategy for nursing students laid some of the major foundations in terms of academic self-concept and awareness of tasks for favourable educational outcomes. They asserted that between the inner judgment of value and the general evaluations of others on the individual, an alignment exists, hence enabling the individual to actualise their full potential (Haynes, 2023). It is especially relevant for higher education, where high self-awareness and the ability to engage in reflective thinking are general education requirements.

Reflective teachers are those who, according to the same source, make wise and informed choices based on an explicit awareness and consideration of their assumptions. Concentration on reflective thinking within the community of teachers would initiate an indirect movement, encouraging the implementation of reflective thinking within the student curriculum. That is, the more educated and reflective practice becomes, the greater the probability of inculcating the same habit in their students, thereby enhancing the quality of the entire educational experience.

Moreover, the use of reflection activities within the university setting has numerous advantages. According to Deveci and Wyatt (2022), critical self-reflection can foster the development of essential thinkers and promote self-knowledge by challenging their beliefs and views. Encouraging self-reflection will enable learners to take responsibility for their learning process and gain a deeper understanding of the journey.

Chen (2021) argues that critical reflection is a key characteristic of an effective teacher, thereby emphasising the importance of integrating reflective activities into teacher training programs. According to this author, reflective teachers develop a conscious awareness of their assumptions and make decisions based on a careful consideration of those assumptions. This emphasis on reflective teaching may then extend to developing reflective thinking among the students and find relevance as a part of the present study.

Additionally, the potential benefits of incorporating think-about activities into college are numerous. Wei et al. (2024) suggest that careful self-checking not only enhances students' thinking skills but also fosters self-understanding by prompting them to evaluate their ideas and views critically. This changing sense of reflection can alter how learners perceive their work, drive, and grades in school. It is imperative that teachers purposefully incorporate thinking strategies to facilitate students' cognitive growth and enhance their learning experience.

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Exploring the Theoretical Framework: Attributions, Emotions, and Academic Performance

To establish a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships between CAS, PE, and AP, the key variables that will guide this empirical investigation require explication. Indeed, each of these variables is critical in shaping the educational experiences of university students; their interactions could therefore propose valuable insights to educationalists in their efforts to enhance student outcomes. This is the section where the reader should expect the variables to be detailed in terms of their definitions, theoretical underpinnings, and the relationship anticipated, which will be tested for in this study.

Controllable Attributions of Success (CAS): Controllable attributions of success are the perceptions students harbour concerning the factors that contribute to their academic achievements, especially those factors that are within their control. According to Weiner's attribution theory, if students tend to attribute their successes to internal and controllable factors, such as effort, persistence, or effective study strategies, then their level of motivation is high, leading to better academic outcomes (Brun et al., 2021). CAS holds that the most critical aspect is self-efficacy because students who believe that they can influence the results of their academics will engage in the kind of behaviours that lead to success. In the context of this study, CAS will be operationalised through a questionnaire prepared for measuring students' beliefs in the controllability of their academic success. Items will assess factors such as effort, study habits, and personal commitment. This way, revealing how learners in higher institutions view their attainment, educators can frame measures that nurture a growth mindset in learners to improve their academic achievement (Bastos, et al. 2022)

Positive emotions: Affectively, they relate to one of a broad scope of states that contribute to one's well-being and are primary motivators in staying engaged and maintaining focus on an endeavour. For example, emotions such as joy, pride, and even enthusiasm all firmly place the individual within the realm of participation. Setting learning experiences and high academic performance are positively related to the knowledge of physical education (PE) in learning. Resilient and motivationally upbeat students approach their studies with enthusiasm.

Previous research has established a relationship between the experience of physical education (PE) in learning and higher academic performance, as upbeat students tend to approach their studies with motivation and resilience. The measurement of PE in this study will be based on a scale that has been previously validated for gauging the emotional experiences of students in

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their academic pursuits. The scale will assess different domains of positive emotions, including those related to studying for exams, participating in class, and general academic engagement. This study, through an analysis of the role of PE in education, will provide impetus for creating favourable emotional climates at universities as a means of enhancing the academic experience for students.

Academic Performance (AP): Academic performance is a measure of the level of success that a student achieves in his or her educational endeavours. Usually, it is based on grades or scores in standardised tests. AP is essential in measuring how well students have learned; it depends on many factors, such as motivation, engagement, and the quality of instructional practices (Wunch et al., 2021). In this research, therefore, AP is operationalised as the students' self-reported grades in the last paper to provide a more objective measure of their achievement. Understanding the dynamics of AP is crucial to identifying how CAS and PE interact to influence the educational outcomes of students. In this study, we shall be concerned with the degree to which the students' beliefs regarding their controllable attributions and their experiences of positive emotions contribute to their overall academic performance.

The theoretical foundation set by those variables supports the basis of the pragmatic implications of this research. In light of this understanding of the interplay among CAS, PE, and AP, the paper will be of great benefit to educators, who will subsequently design interventions aimed at enhancing a positive learning environment (Trigueros et al., 2020).

Such strategies include self-reflection, where educators can initiate this practice and make it a part of the culture at learning institutions to assess their efforts and the successes of students. This will make students more aware of their controllable factors and encourage them to take the driving seat in their academic journey. Emotional support integration: The creation of an emotionally supportive classroom environment is likely to create positive emotions among students (Caggiano et al., 2020). The institution should organise team-building activities, celebrate success, and give positive feedback aimed at enhancement. Metacognitive strategy implementation: Students should be trained in metacognitive strategies, such as setting goals and self-monitoring, to achieve greater perceived control over their academic success, which should enhance CAS and subsequent levels of PE and AP. Thus, the theoretical framework has brought into focus the essential variable of controllable attributions of success, positive emotions, and academic performance (Coluzzi et al., 2024). By examining the relationship between these three variables, this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on whether reflective practices can enhance academic motivation

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and performance among university students. Practitioners will utilise the findings from this study to inform the development of an educational environment that promotes the wellness and success of students.

The Applied research

This section details the empirical research conducted to explore the relationships among controllable attributions of success (CAS), positive emotions (PE), and academic performance (AP) among university students. The study employs a cross-sectional design, utilising a combination of quantitative measures to gather data from participants. The following subsections outline the sample, the tools used for data collection, and the overall research procedure.

Procedure and data collection: The data collection had to be carried out in a phased manner to maintain order and ethics. The study initially received approval from the University's Ethics Committee, ensuring that the research involving human subjects was conducted by ethical standards. Upon receipt of approval, the authors initiated contact with faculty to have the study introduced in their classes. Upon acceptance by the instructors, the students were invited to participate in designated class days, after the authors had informed them of the study's objectives and assured them of their anonymity and the confidentiality that would be accorded to their responses. The questionnaires were given to the subjects in printed form, to be filled out in a quiet classroom setting, thereby reducing any possible sources of distraction. On average, approximately 20 minutes was required to complete the questionnaires. Upon completion of the scales, respondents were thanked for their cooperation and asked to seek clarification on any issues relating to the study. Data obtained from the completed questionnaires were entered into a database and checked. After that, the data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software for analysis. The first step in the data analysis included computing the correlation among CAS, PE, and AP to measure the nature and direction of the relationship between these variables. The second step used the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS to estimate the size of the mediation effect of positive emotions in the relationship between controllable attributions and academic performance. This structured approach to sampling, measurement, and data collection is presumed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings regarding how controllable attributions influence positive emotions and academic performance among university students.

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The 200 Spanish university students from different degree programs were included in the sample: 104 females (52%) and 92 males (46%) with four other or non-binary individuals (2%), thus approximating equal gender distribution. Regarding age, the participants were between 18 and 25 years old. One hundred students (50%) were in the 18-20 year age group, who chose to illustrate, while 90 students (45%) were between 21 and 23 years old. The remaining 30 students (15%) fell within the age range of 24-25, indicating a young population interested in pursuing further education. The educational levels of the recruits varied significantly, which enhanced the quality of the information. Pupils from the arts made up the most significant part, with 60 people (30%) involved in subjects like literature and philosophy. Those in the social studies were 50 students (25%), concentrating on areas such as psychology and sociology. The physical sciences drew 40 students (20%), while 30 students (15%) were studying engineering. At last, 20 students (10%) were placed in commerce and economics courses. This varied sample provides a comprehensive view of how controllable explanations of success and positive feelings interact among students from diverse academic backgrounds in Spain. Before collecting the data, all test subjects were informed of the study's objectives and goals, as well as their rights as participants. The gathering of written consents from all the samples assured that they were volunteering for the sample and that their responses would be kept confidential. This research wanted to enrich the generalizability of the findings by trying to see if there were variations in CAS and PE in different areas of study because it aimed to cover a broad spectrum of academic backgrounds.

Tool: Data collection used three validated instruments, each designed to measure a specific variable within the study.

The Academic Success Attribution Questionnaire (ASAQ) measures success as attributed by students. This instrument consists of 12 items, which form three dimensions: internal controllable attributions (e.g., effort), internal uncontrollable attributions (e.g., ability), and external attributions (e.g., luck). Respondents replied on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ASAQ items are considered internally consistent since the Cronbach's alpha yielded 0.78, which is fine reliability.

The Positive Emotions Scale (PES) measures the emotions experienced by students during their academic activities. This scale comprises items that assess emotions such as joy, pride, and enthusiasm related to scholarly work. Emotional experiences were rated by participants on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The internal consistency of the PES was strong, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88, indicating reliability.

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Academic Performance Measure: Academic performance was operationally defined as the average grades reported by respondents in their most recent examinations, conducted on a standardised 0-10 grading scale. This measure of objective reality provides a direct assessment of the relationship between the other variables and academic outcomes.

Data analysis: The data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics constituted the first step of the analysis, which provided a summary with specific measures of demographic features. The means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions of CAS, PE, and AP were calculated at this stage to provide an initial overview. Such an approach would help lay a basic foundation for understanding the data and identifying any anomalies or outliers.

Correlation Analysis: To determine the extent and direction of relationships between the key variables of the study (CAS, PE, and AP), their Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. It tells us about the strength and direction of relationships among the variables.

Mediation Analysis: To determine whether positive emotions act as a mediating factor between controllable attributions of success and academic performance, a mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2013). It has three steps: First, the direct effects of CAS on AP were computed; Second, the direct effects of CAS on PE were computed. Finally, the indirect impact of CAS on AP through PE was computed. Efron's accelerated bootstrap method, with 5,000 resamples, was used to estimate 95% confidence intervals for the mediated effect, ensuring that the test's sensitivity is at an acceptable level.

All statistical tests were performed at a p-value of 0.05. This simple rule has the advantage of being easy to remember and use, as well as easy to convey within the existing literature on CAS, PE, and AP.

Results and Discussion: The data analysis yielded informative findings regarding the association between controllable success attributions and positive emotions, on the one hand, and academic performance among university students, on the other.

Descriptive Statistics: The mean controllable attributions of success score was 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.72. This would be translated as relatively positive perceptions of controllability by participants. The mean positive emotions score was 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.65. This can be translated as positive feelings by students on most occasions concerning their academic activities. Participants reported that the mean academic performance score is 7.45, with a standard deviation of 1.23, on a scale of 0 to 10.

Correlation Analysis: The correlation analysis yielded significant positive

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correlations among the three variables, as follows: CAS and PE, with a value of 0.63 and a p-value less than 0.001. This implies that those students who attributed their success to factors that they could control registered high positive emotions. PE and AP: A value of 0.54 with a p-value less than 0.001. This means that those students who had positive emotions tended to perform better academically. CAS was positively correlated with AP ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students who perceived their attributions as controllable tended to perform better academically.

A mediation analysis was conducted to confirm that positive emotions indeed serve as a mediator in the relationship between controllable attributions of success and academic performance. The relationship between CAS and AP proved to be direct and statistical.

Conclusion

This study examines the intricate relationship between controllable attributions of success, positive emotions, and academic performance in a university setting, aiming to shed light on the role that reflexivity plays in an educational context. Results indicated that students who attribute their academic success to controllable factors, such as input and diligence, can experience positive emotions. This, in turn, positively and significantly influences academic performance, thereby strengthening the relationship between the three factors. Results show that the development of a culture of reflection in higher education can impact success, with implications for various programs. This can motivate students to reflect on what happens within them during the learning process and identify their strengths and weaknesses. According to Sánchez-Álvarez and Yancey (2020), this reflection will eventually lead students away from external validation and toward finding it within themselves, enabling them to undertake an academic exercise with all its seriousness. This is the kind of intrinsic motivation needed for the improvement of both PE and AP, forming a reinforcement dynamic that cultivates extended academic involvement. The results of the study will hold significant meaning for those involved in efforts to create and sustain emotionally healthy attitudes among students. It will keep the question of bullying at the very centre of the discussion on social interactions in university environments (Schleutker et al., 2019). Indeed, the influence that bullying has on positive emotions demands that educational authorities implement practical measures that foster a sense of support and, consequently, resilience in students. The first prerequisite for a positive

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emotional experience that leads to success in any academic intervention is the establishment of safety and security.

The practical implications of this study are essential for educators and policymakers. Reflective practices should be integrated into the curriculum as an approach that enables students to take ownership of their learning and apply it to develop a growth mindset.

Professional development programs for the teaching faculty to enhance their practice of reflection will also significantly contribute to establishing a reflective culture in the classroom, ultimately benefiting students through improved academic experiences.

Future studies should investigate the relationships between CAS, PE, and AP across various types of school settings and populations. Long-term studies could provide more insights into how these links change over time, while tests could assess specific actions that help improve students' controllable factors and overall happiness. Additionally, examining how other setting factors contribute, such as teacher support and peer relationships, may reveal more about academic success.

This work contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the importance of being reflexive, feeling good, and making controllable interpretations in higher education. If these factors are given priority, a more inclusive and empowering learning environment for students will be created, equipping them with the tools for success in both academic and professional endeavours.

Staff teaching development programs to enhance their practice of reflection will also help establish a thinking culture in the classroom, which will benefit students through improved academic experiences.

Future research should investigate the relationships between CAS, PE, and AP in diverse school settings and populations. Longitudinal studies would provide more insight into how these links change over time, while tests could assess specific actions that help improve students' controllable factors and overall happiness. Other setting factors, such as teacher support and peer relationships, may show more insight into academic success.

This work contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the importance of reflection, self-care, and making sense of experiences in higher education. If these factors are prioritised, then more inclusive and empowering learning environments will be established for students to learn and achieve success in both academic and professional activities.

The findings will create a demand in academia to include issues that help students develop self-reflective and emotional awareness, thus leading to better academic results and a more engaging educational experience.

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