

## Conceptos de éxito y fracaso desde la perspectiva de estudiantes para profesor en formación

*Concepts of success and failure from the perspective of students for teacher  
in training*

*Conceitos de sucesso e fracasso na perspectiva dos alunos para o professor  
em formação*

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### Resumen

En esta investigación se analiza cómo se construyen las representaciones sociales que el colectivo docente en formación tiene en relación con los conceptos de éxito o fracaso escolar. Se parte desde el momento de la formación del profesorado, pues es en esta etapa donde la conformación de *habitus* se consolida a partir de las primeras experiencias prácticas, de la convivencia con docentes experimentados y del intercambio con el grupo de pares en formación. Para recabar los datos, se diseñó un instrumento para el análisis de representaciones sociales de profesores en formación, el cual estuvo constituido por una

escala de diferencial semántico que se les presentó a los participantes con el fin de determinar los constructos *alumno exitoso* y *alumno fracasado*. Los resultados hallados permiten concluir que existen consensos en la representación social del éxito y del fracaso escolar orientada al esfuerzo continuo y al trabajo perseverante. Estos resultados ofrecen nuevas posibilidades para seguir indagando en este fenómeno, el cual se puede comparar con otras poblaciones y a partir de otras maneras de entender dichos conceptos.

**Palabras clave:** éxito escolar, formación de profesores, fracaso escolar, representaciones sociales.

### **Abstract**

This research analyzes how the social representations that the teaching group in formation are constructed, have regarding the concepts of school success or failure. It starts from the moment of teacher training, because it is there where the conformation of *habitus* is consolidated due the first practical experiences, the coexistence with experienced teachers and the exchange with the peer group in formation as well.

To collect the data, an instrument was designed for the analysis of social representations of teachers in training, which was constituted by a scale of semantic differential that was presented to the participants in order to determine the social representation of successful and unsuccessful student. The results found allow us to conclude that there are consensus in the social representation of success and school failure oriented to continuous effort and persistent work. These results offer new possibilities to continue investigating this phenomenon, which can be compared with other populations and from other ways of understanding these concepts.

**Keywords:** school success, teacher training, school failure, social representations.

## Resumo

Nesta pesquisa analisamos como são construídas as representações sociais que o grupo de ensino em formação tem em relação aos conceitos de sucesso ou fracasso escolar. Começa a partir do momento da formação de professores, pois é nesse estágio que o habitus se consolida a partir das primeiras experiências práticas, convivendo com professores experientes e trocando com o grupo de pares em formação. Para coletar os dados, foi elaborado um instrumento para a análise das representações sociais dos professores em formação, constituído por uma escala de diferencial semântico que foi apresentada aos participantes para determinar os construtos aluno de sucesso e aluno malsucedido. Os resultados encontrados nos permitem concluir que há consenso na representação social do sucesso escolar e do fracasso escolar orientado ao esforço contínuo e ao trabalho persistente. Esses resultados oferecem novas possibilidades para continuar investigando esse fenômeno, que pode ser comparado com outras populações e com outras formas de entender esses conceitos.

**Palavras-chave:** sucesso escolar, formação de professores, fracasso escolar, representações sociais.

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## Introduction

The theory of social representations (SR) has had different applications and has been studied for various purposes that try to integrate data collection techniques and interpretations, both quantitative and qualitative. Even so, it is enough to start from the premise that social representations are the ways in which we construct and deconstruct the world around us to understand that these give meaning to our experiences and guide our decision making.

These representations, therefore, have a theoretical value in different fields of knowledge (eg, psychology, sociology, education, among others) because this concept poses a theoretical convergence between cognitive and affective aspects, as well as in the

dispositions to act, which allows to present a solid effort to integrate other concepts, such as attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, etc. (Corvalán, 2013).

In this sense, social representations are also a way of understanding the knowledge that is produced, because it overcomes the individual-society dichotomy, given that the proposal is based on shared practices that make subjects feel that their behaviors are not random, but rather that they start from true knowledge. In this regard, Farr (1983, cited by Corvalán, 2013) points out that SRs have a double function:

First, establish an order that allows individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to dominate it; second, to enable communication among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code to name and unambiguously classify the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history (p. 119).

Starting from that idea, we all conform and need social representations to make sense of life, because this allows us to rationalize why we behave as we do and explain our individuality, so that a deep reflection of how our SRs are made up (through of what, who, when and where) serves to generate a dialogue and a confrontation with our individual essence. This is because SRs also help us to understand, explain and even accept which are the roles that correspond to us, as well as the position, sometimes fateful, that "destiny" places us.

In this sense, practically all concepts (life, love, death, merit, failure) have been socially constructed, so it can be said that "a complex perspective of recognition of the units of analysis is explicitly or implicitly supported. The individual, the social, the biological, the cultural, the rational, the emotional (...) constitute essential and historical qualities of human evolution "(Corvalán, 2013, p.120). As Moscovici (1969) points out, "social representations are cognitive systems that have their own logic and language, and that are not simple 'opinions about', or 'images of' or 'attitudes toward', but 'theories' sui generis destined to discover reality and its ordering "(p.35), hence its in-depth study and analysis continue to be relevant in our everyday world, because by observing a social representation you can also see how it is shaped, defined and separated to a group of others (Di Giacomo, 1987).

## Development

In Mexico the body of teachers is increasingly broad. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Inegi) and the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), in 2013 there were a total of 236,973 work centers in the country, where 1,266,544 teachers were working with 23 562 183 students from pre-school, primary, secondary and special education centers, which in general terms indicates that in the country there is at least one teacher for every 18 students.

This means not only that a significant number of education professionals are required every day, but also that it is necessary to investigate the way in which they are located as a group, that is, what they do, say, share, study, etc., because they are the ones who interpret and apply the current curriculum. In this regard, Piña and Cuevas (2004) think:

Educational agents are integrated into communities where they cultivate thought forms close to or apart from legitimate academic guidelines. A curriculum can be finely designed because it took into account the social demands of the moment, the demands of the discipline taught and the coherence between the contents and their sequence; However, educational actors, teachers, students and authorities are responsible for implementing it. For example, the beliefs of some of them about what is the ideal training, or about the way of teaching, or the familiarity with the contents can lead to changes in the design of that curriculum. (p. 105).

In this sense, social representations are created in the very heart of teacher training that links the knowledge generated by common sense (what a priori knows to be a teacher) with what is technically and scientifically expected from it, always taking in consideration that a teacher is formed by another teacher; For this reason, it can be assured that much of what underlies SR is the product of the apprehension of others, who in turn learned and apprehended others. In the words of Cruz (2006), the world is constructed through a socially shared knowledge influenced by the interpretations that others offer of "reality".

This does not mean that SRs are a kind of inevitable luck (unless the subject believes

it that way), although in general terms it can not be said that they are static, since the subject that produces them also participates in its construction, reconstruction and transformation to transmit them to others "in a dialectical process between objective and subjective reality (...) in order to classify a social object and explain its characteristics, to incorporate it into their daily reality" (Cruz, 2006, p.37).

Added to this, the power of SRs is that, on the one hand, they are incorporated into individual and collective discourse as references of what should be and what to do, and once linked to everyday practices "become truths for common sense "(Billig, 1993, cited by Cruz, 2006, p.38). This explains why a group of teachers, for example, can share similar perceptions about what would be the "good" or "bad" performance of a group, which can be inherited by the following teachers of the school year, who will create prejudices. about what should be the treatment that a certain group would have to receive, as well as establishing what can or can not be expected from it. In short, SRs, although they are collective, are also imbricated in a subjectivity that transforms them, uses them and becomes part of their identity. For this reason, Akkerman and Meijer (2011, cited by Antunes and Monereo, 2016) point out the following in relation to teacher professional identity:

It is interdependent and is shaped by the teacher's perception of himself, and also by how he is perceived by others. Each educational context provides elements to generate specific positions of the Self and learning opportunities; Learning, in this context, is seen as the ability of the teacher to adjust their positions or to create new positions by participating in shared practices (...). From the point of view of the dialogic self, being a teacher is a process of continuous negotiation of multiple positions of the Self, in such a way that a more or less consistent sense of the self is maintained throughout his professional life. (p. 2).

This idea, however, takes on a different hue if we consider the professional identity from the point made by Jodelet (1984), who points out that the subject does not access daily interactions spontaneously and neutrally, but already has RS that allow him anticipate the situation, prepare the interaction and act.

Therefore, the theory of SR, as well as its link with teacher professional training and the new conceptual horizons that are gradually contributing to the development of social sciences make it stand out "the importance of the theory and study of SR in educational research (...), [then] is an emerging problem within the social sciences and, especially, in educational research in Mexico "(Piña and Cuevas, 2004, p.102).

In this sense, SRs are not static if they represent "the frame of reference that allows the classification and evaluation of objects, subjects, relationships, events, situations, etc., based on simple and operational categories" (Cruz, 2006, p 41). Based on this premise, it can be indicated that there are three reasons why the study of the SR of teachers in training contributes to the field of education sciences:

1. It raises new questions about teacher training and their professional development.
2. It situates the national curriculum and the Mexican educational model in a context of new conceptual and social demands (Borg and Mayo, 2001).
3. It offers a scenario for the discussion of the current educational policies in the regulation of teachers, professors and schools.

Next, each of the reasons mentioned is explained: first, and according to Jiménez and Perales (2007), for some time now the discussion about where to direct the teacher ethos is open: if continue based on the norm and in the prescription of what and how the teacher should do and think, or move towards a critical restructuring of current demands for teachers, which encourages the debate on how, why and for what teachers should be trained.

Thus, in this line of thought, the research of the SR related to teacher training pays attention to the discussion and provides theoretical elements for a possible reconfiguration of the curriculum in teacher training. In fact, when dealing with the professional development of teachers, they must consider the consolidation of their own system and, therefore, their identities as a fundamentally dialogical activity that allows the analysis of learning activities in a particular context.

The professional development of teachers is usually represented by an internal struggle that tries to accommodate the different positions of the self to make them consistent and continuous. One way to contribute to the professional development of teachers, from the dialogical perspective, is to examine more closely the problems, dilemmas and uncertainties that they experience in daily educational institutions and in the classrooms. Research on teachers' dialogues, and on their interactions with students and other actors in the educational scene is a valuable means to access their representations and perceptions, which will contribute to their transformation and development because it provides new guidelines for to train more critical and reflective teachers of their own practice, that is, teachers who understand the magnitude of the cultural task that corresponds to them to transform the habitus (De Ibarrola, cited by Jiménez and Perales, 2007). Moreover, considering that the SR of a teacher in training "dispose it attitudinally (...), they mark patterns of relationships and decisions that are translated into behaviors, which participate in inter and intragroup relations" (Cruz, 2006, p.38). ).

Additionally, the significance of studying the SRs is that they also guide public policies. As mentioned by Marambio, Gil de Montes and Valencia, (2015), if there is a belief that only some people can reach a maximum intelligence potential, then it would not be necessary to invest resources in people who-given their limited capacity-will not be able to take advantage of them; consequently, educational policies will be reluctant to correct social inequalities. On the other hand, if there is a belief that all people have the potential to reach higher levels of intelligence, this will guide more favorable and equitable educational initiatives (Rattan et al., 2012, cited by Marambio et al., 2015). In other words, the representations of intelligence are associated with success or failure at school, because it is generally judged to a greater or lesser extent that the intelligent student is successful and, therefore, worthy. On this aspect, Marambio et al. (2015) comment:

The justification that only the most intelligent can access educational resources, in turn, argues social hierarchies and promotes values based on personal merit and competitiveness. Therefore, scientific thinking built around intelligence is a source of authority, legitimacy and justification of political-deological decisions (Wagner & Halles, 2011). Beliefs like the meritocracy, so well known in the academic field, is composed of a conception of individual intelligence. If the person does not possess genetically given abilities and strives to overcome their limitations, the responsibility for the development of intelligence rests with the individual. In this way, if there is academic success, the student is worthy of access to better opportunities in life, which will be a reward for his personal effort. In a contrary sense, the school failure is attributed to the lack of dedication of the student, reason why it will not have access to opportunities of scholastic development and, therefore, to better labor opportunities in the future (p. 7).

Therefore, studying the SR of success and failure also has an impact on educational policies and, in the particular case of this research, on the subject of teacher training, since the curriculum is determined by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, the objective of this work was to analyze the social representations of success and failure in university students who are studying the teaching career.

## **Methodology**

In Latin America and Europe there is a vast literature on social representations, which serves as a basis to ensure that this construct is made up of constituent and constituent elements. Paraphrasing Corvalán (2013), in the concept of social representations implicitly is the need to define the psychosocial, both of the individual and of the way in which the collective functions, that is, according to the biological, social, individual and cultural elements. that constitute it. This heterogeneity causes that from the methodological point of view it should be foreseen that there are also "different methods of approach for the study of social representations, different quantitative techniques, qualitative techniques, which are displayed according to the different theoretical aspects (...) [ who depend] on the theoretical-

methodological approach they propose "(Corvalán, 2013, p.118).

Taking into account this particularity, the present investigation intends to continue providing theoretical and critical foundations that serve to nourish the study of SR from other methodological perspectives. Specifically, and to collect the data, an instrument was designed for the analysis of social representations of teachers in training, which was constituted by a semantic differential scale that was presented to the participants in order to determine the proposed constructs: successful or unsuccessful student

The adjectives that constituted the scale were extracted from the review of the literature, as well as from the model proposed by Kaplan (1992), which divides the suggested words into different categories with the purpose of demonstrating whether toward one of these the teacher's conception is inclined in formation, or what Perrenoud called the trade of being a student. It should be noted that items 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18 and 19 were recoded so that their processing was consistent with the other pairs of words in the instrument.

## **Results**

In this work we counted on the collaboration of a group of 42 students for a professor from a university in the southeast of Mexico. Of these, 19 (45.2%) were men and 23 (54.8%) were women. The average age of the participants was 20 years. The school average of the group, considering the qualifications of the previous semester, was 87.56 points. It is worth mentioning that 33.3% of the participants indicated that they had failed between 1 and 6 subjects during their formative degree course.

These variables were important because in future moments we intend to perform different comparative analyzes from these variables. In a first contextualization of the participants, and from the question "What is the highest level of education to which you aspire ?", it is possible to appreciate the following (table 1):

**Tabla 1.** Sexo y nivel educativo

|       |        | <i>¿Cuál es el máximo nivel educativo al que aspiras?</i> |              |          |           |       |
|-------|--------|---|--------------|----------|-----------|-------|
|       |        | Licenciatura  | Especialidad | Maestría | Doctorado | Total |
| Sexo  | Hombre | 3   | 3            | 4        | 9         | 19    |
|       | Mujer  | 0   | 4            | 10       | 9         | 23    |
| Total |        | 3   | 7            | 14       | 18        | 42    |

Fuente: Elaboración propia

As can be seen in table 1, there are no significant variations in relation to gender and the aspirations of the participants regarding greater academic preparation. However, there is a correlation between the disapproval of subjects and the number of these in relation to academic aspirations, as shown in table 2:

**Tabla 2.** Relación entre aspiraciones académicas y asignaturas reprobadas

|   |                        | <i>¿Cuál es el máximo nivel académico al que aspiras?</i> | <i>¿Has reprobado?</i> |
|---|------------------------|---|------------------------|
| <i>¿Has reprobado?</i>                                    | Correlación de Pearson | 1   | .307*                  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)        |   | .048                   |
| <i>¿Cuál es el máximo nivel académico al que aspiras?</i> | Correlación de Pearson | .307*   | 1                      |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)        | .048  |                        |
| <i>¿Cuántas has reprobado?</i>                            | Correlación de Pearson |   | -.350*                 |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)        |   | .023                   |

Fuente: Elaboración propia

As can be seen, the p-value is below the expected alpha (0.005), so in both cases it is relevant. However, it is worth indicating that although the correlation is not so strong, it is a first indicator of how successes and failures can, eventually, determine how much further progress is being made. Obviously, it is not the only factor, but it is a variable that can not be underestimated. In fact, one can notice the negative correlation between the level of aspirations and the number of failed subjects, because to the extent that they increase, the educational level that is intended to be achieved decreases. Again, this coincides with the idea that successes and failures built in school and from school can be determinant in certain ideals, because they perpetuate the idea that whoever advances has merits, potential and abilities that make it more apt for academic life. .

On the other hand, regarding the elements that should characterize a successful student, the participants answered the following (table 3):

**Tabla 3.** Respuestas de la RS: alumno exitoso

|   | N  | Mínimo | Máximo | Media | Desviación<br>estándar |
|---|----|--------|--------|-------|------------------------|
| Familia separada-familia<br>constituída | 42 | 4      | 7      | 4.07  | .463                   |
| Reservado-conversador                   | 42 | 2      | 7      | 4.24  | .983                   |
| Inquieto-tranquilo                      | 42 | 1      | 7      | 4.33  | 1.373                  |
| Agresivo-dócil                          | 42 | 3      | 7      | 4.55  | .889                   |
| Sociable-aislado                        | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.19  | 1.401                  |
| Desaseado-aseado                        | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.21  | 1.440                  |
| Simpático-antipático                    | 42 | 3      | 7      | 5.21  | 1.220                  |
| Lento-ágil                              | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.33  | 1.262                  |
| Grosero-amable                          | 42 | 1      | 7      | 5.55  | 1.485                  |
| Inteligente                             | 42 | 4      | 7      | 5.69  | 1.070                  |
| Maduro-inmaduro                         | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.69  | 1.259                  |
| Puntual-impuntual                       | 42 | 1      | 7      | 5.74  | 1.363                  |
| Tradicional-innovador                   | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.79  | 1.220                  |
| Apático-interesado                      | 42 | 2      | 7      | 5.79  | 1.240                  |
| Cuidadoso-descuidado                    | 42 | 4      | 7      | 5.79  | 1.048                  |
| Atento-distraído                        | 42 | 4      | 7      | 5.95  | 1.058                  |
| Torpe-hábil                             | 41 | 4      | 7      | 6.20  | 1.030                  |
| Acrítico-crítico                        | 42 | 4      | 7      | 6.29  | 1.043                  |
| Holgazán-trabajador                     | 42 | 4      | 7      | 6.38  | .962                   |
| Motivado-desmotivado                    | 42 | 4      | 7      | 6.40  | .857                   |
| Irresponsable-responsable               | 42 | 3      | 7      | 6.57  | .914                   |

Fuente: Elaboración propia

One of the advantages offered by the semantic differential is that (in contrast to other types of scales such as the Likert type) it proposes a continuum of meanings whose psychometric properties allow us to identify distances between the word opposites, and not only a specific order, that is, it is possible to give an interval scale treatment and obtain measures of central tendency and deviation.

For the above, and being the differential of seven points on the scale, the value 4 would represent the neutrality between the polar pairs of adjectives. In that sense, let's take the extremes that constitute the SR of the successful student. In the first place, we can appreciate that the characteristics of a separated or constituted family (understanding the latter as a traditional family, under the hegemonic heteronormative schemes) was the least valued element as a factor that could be determinant in the student's success. In fact, it presented the smallest standard deviation, that is, the generalized response of the study subjects was much more consistent.

This data coincides with the literature and Kaplan's own model (1992), who found that for Mexican teachers, unlike other teachers in Latin America, the family constitution was not as important, nor was it that the student was reserved or conversationalist.

On the contrary, and according to the perception of the participants, the SR of a successful student is constituted by the following qualities: being responsible ( $x = 6.57$ ,  $DS = .914$ ), being motivated ( $x = 6.40$ ,  $DS = .857$ ) and be a worker ( $x = 6.38$ ,  $DS = .962$ ); that is, the idea of success is associated with intrinsic characteristics in the student, that is, characteristic of individual effort and persistence, as well as the ability to be self-sustaining.

In relation to the failure, the results seem to indicate that the same three pairs of words were selected to categorize the student who fails, although in a different order and score: demotivated ( $x = 2.40$ ,  $DS = 1.499$ ), irresponsible ( $x = 2.43$ ,  $DS = 1.343$ ) and loafer ( $x = 2.60$ ,  $DS = 1.106$ ); It should be noted that the data in reverse indicate that to the extent that the score approaches 1, the opposition of the attribute is "favorable".

Likewise, it is interesting to underline that the dispersion of data in relation to failure is greater, which can be explained due to the multiple elements that can be considered around the student's low performance. Even so, the general results of the characterization of failure are presented in table 4:

**Tabla 4.** Respuestas de la RS: alumno que fracasa

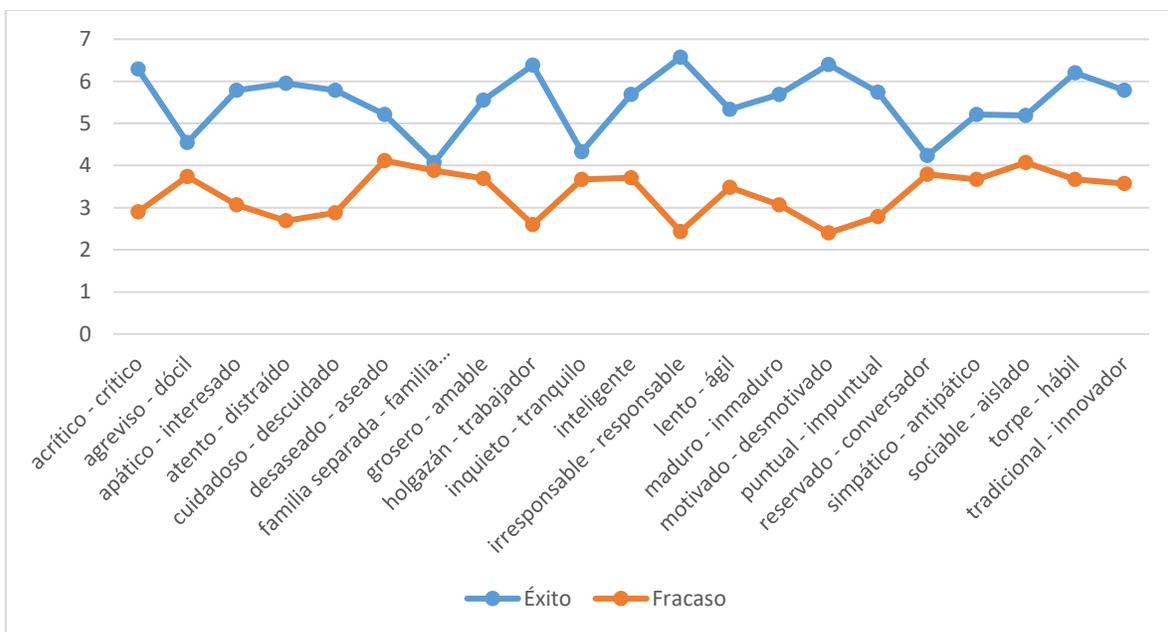
|   | N  | Mínimo | Máximo | Media | Desviación |
|---|----|--------|--------|-------|------------|
| Motivado-desmotivado                    | 42 | 1      | 7      | 2.40  | 1.499      |
| Irresponsable-responsable               | 42 | 1      | 7      | 2.43  | 1.346      |
| Holgazán-trabajador                     | 42 | 1      | 4      | 2.60  | 1.106      |
| Atento-distraído                        | 42 | 1      | 5      | 2.69  | 1.259      |
| Puntual-impuntual                       | 42 | 1      | 4      | 2.79  | 1.260      |
| Cuidadoso-descuidado                    | 42 | 1      | 6      | 2.88  | 1.214      |
| Acrítico-crítico                        | 42 | 1      | 7      | 2.90  | 1.265      |
| Maduro-inmaduro                         | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.07  | 1.156      |
| Apático-interesado                      | 42 | 1      | 7      | 3.07  | 1.455      |
| Lento-ágil                              | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.48  | 1.087      |
| Tradicional-innovador                   | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.57  | 1.151      |
| Simpático-antipático                    | 42 | 1      | 7      | 3.67  | 1.408      |
| Inquieto-tranquilo                      | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.67  | .874       |
| Torpe-hábil                             | 42 | 1      | 7      | 3.67  | 1.282      |
| Grosero-amable                          | 42 | 1      | 7      | 3.69  | 1.024      |
| Inteligente                             | 42 | 2      | 4      | 3.71  | .596       |
| Agresivo-dócil                          | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.74  | .939       |
| Reservado-conversador                   | 42 | 1      | 6      | 3.79  | 1.025      |
| Familia separada-familia<br>constituida | 42 | 1      | 4      | 3.88  | .504       |
| Sociable-aislado                        | 42 | 1      | 7      | 4.07  | 1.197      |
| Desaseado-aseado                        | 42 | 1      | 7      | 4.12  | 1.109      |

Elaboración propia

## Conclusion

The results found in this research allow us to conclude that there are certain consensuses in the social representation that a group of university students who study the teaching career have around the characteristics that define a successful student or one that fails. In figure 1 you can see the similarities and differences found:

**Figura 1.** Comparación de medias entre los pares de alumno exitoso y fracasado



Fuente: Elaboración propia

Figure 1 shows greater difference between the words responsible, worker and motivated, and closer (minimum difference) between the family constitution and behavior in the classroom of the student (in terms of whether he is quiet or talkative). Likewise, the intelligent qualifier attracts attention, since this -from the vision of the student- is a neutral element for a person to fail, although it is to achieve success ( $x = 5.69$ ), although it is below work and the effort.

According to the above, it can be said that students have a vision of success and failure oriented to continuous effort and persistent work, so they would expect to act accordingly. These results offer new possibilities to continue investigating this phenomenon, which can be compared with other populations and ways of understanding these concepts. In this way, it can contribute to a deeper understanding of both the work of teachers and other variables, such as sex, the curriculum, the semester, among others. In addition, these findings together could serve to generate educational policies for teachers and students. In the case of the former, in terms of teacher training, promotion and continuing education; in the case of students, for access to scholarships and other educational levels. All this, in fact, can serve to provide more elements around the way in which they are evaluated and receive feedback, which can make the process even more transparent to visualize possible vices and challenges, as well as to promote an authentic social justice through of the educational process.

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| Curación de datos                             | Galo López Gamboa (principal) Edith Cisneros Cohernour (apoyo)                                    |
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