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ORIGINAL

## Factors that bias teacher expectations: Findings from Chile

Carmen A. Barriga<sup>a</sup>, Cristina Rodríguez<sup>a,b\*</sup> y Roberto A. Ferreira<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Facultad de Educación, Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción. Concepción, Chile

<sup>b</sup> Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de La Laguna. La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain

<sup>c</sup> Facultad de Educación, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile

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Teacher expectations,  
Socio-economic status,  
school SES,  
teacher experience,  
gender

**Abstract** It is well-known that teacher expectations tend to be biased by factors such as student socio-economic status (SES) and gender. However, much less research has been devoted to understanding how teacher characteristics may impact their own expectations of the students. The present study investigated teacher expectations for 343 Chilean teachers (240 in-service and 103 pre-service). We first designed and validated an instrument to measure expectations; then we assessed the effect of teacher gender and experience, and student gender and school-SES in the formation of teacher expectations. The data were analysed using hypothesis and data-driven analyses. The results showed that SES had an effect on teacher expectations ( $\eta^2 = .03$  to  $.12$ ); there was a higher probability that teachers from high-SES schools would have positive expectations of their students. However, negative expectations were equally distributed across teachers working in high and low-SES schools. There was also no evidence of the effect of teacher or student gender on teacher expectations. With respect to teacher experience, the findings were clear cut; both pre-service and in-service teachers shared identical expectations of their students. These findings have important implications regarding teacher training programmes since the expectation bias is observed very early during training.

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### Factores que sesgan las expectativas docentes: hallazgos en Chile

**Resumen** Es bien sabido que las expectativas docentes tienden a estar sesgadas por factores como el nivel socioeconómico de los estudiantes (NSE) y el género. Sin embargo, se ha investigado menos cómo las características de los docentes pueden afectar sus propias expectativas de los estudiantes. El presente estudio investigó las expectativas de 343 docentes chilenos (240 en servicio y 103 alumnos en prácticas). Primero se diseñó y validó un instrumento para medir expectativas; luego se evaluó el efecto del género y experiencia del profesor, y el género del estudiante y NSE de la escuela en la formación de las expectativas del profesor. Los datos fueron analizados mediante técnicas dirigidas por hipótesis y por datos. Los resultados mostraron un efecto del NSE de la escuela en las expectativas docentes ( $\eta^2 = .03$  a  $.12$ ), con una mayor probabilidad de que los profesores de escuelas con alto NSE tengan expectativas positivas de sus estudiantes. Sin

### PALABRAS CLAVE

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\* Autor para correspondencia.  
e-mail: [crodr@ull.es](mailto:crodr@ull.es)

embargo, las expectativas negativas fueron distribuidas equitativamente entre los profesores que trabajaban en escuelas con bajo y alto NSE. Tampoco hubo evidencia del efecto de género de los profesores o estudiantes en las expectativas del profesor. Respecto a la experiencia del profesor, los hallazgos son claros; tanto los estudiantes en práctica profesional como los profesores en servicio mostraron idénticas expectativas hacia sus estudiantes. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones importantes respecto a los programas de formación docente ya que el sesgo de las expectativas se observa tempranamente desde la formación.

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Teacher expectations may be understood as the belief a teacher has in the achievement potential of their students. The significance of this lies in the fact that they have the power to determine both the level of educational content and the way it is imparted (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012). The expectations construct was first developed by Merton (1948) based on a sociological perspective under the term *self-fulfilling prophecy*. He showed that false beliefs towards something or someone determined behaviours that made these beliefs real. Two decades later, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) were among the first researchers to apply the self-fulfilling prophecy to the school context. Although their findings have been widely criticized (see Good, Sterzinger & Lavigne, 2018), they laid the groundwork for more research in this field to be able to understand; for example, that when a teacher has high expectations of their students, their academic achievement also tends to be higher. In contrast, when a teacher's expectations are low, students' results tend to be poorer (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Sibley & Rosenthal, 2015; Rubie-Davies & Rosenthal, 2016). To date, the consensus has been that teacher expectations may be biased by student gender (Boerma, Mol, & Jolles, 2015; Tiedemann, 2000) and socio-economic status (SES) (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Del Río & Balladares, 2010; Regalla, 2013; Sweatt, 2000; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010).

Teacher expectations have been studied primarily in countries such as New Zealand (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Speybroeck et al., 2012), the USA (Boerma et al., 2015; Sorhagen, 2013), and Germany (Tiedemann, 2000). However, in less-developed countries, such as those in Latin America, the subject has not been researched in any depth. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, there has been only one Chilean study to directly and empirically address teacher expectations for pre-service teachers (see Del Río & Balladares, 2010). Furthermore, the majority of studies looking at teacher expectations worldwide have focused on the effect of factors such as student SES and gender in the formation of expectations (Rubie-Davies, et al., 2011; Watson, et al., 2015) and have overlooked other important variables, such as the characteristics of the teachers themselves (age, experience, gender, etc.). Hence, there is a need to explore teacher expectations in Latin American countries and assess to what extent teacher characteristics can shape teacher expectations of students' academic achievement. For example, in Latin America - and especially in Chile - there have been no empirical studies that have considered teacher expectations as a possible cause of poor student performance, particularly among those from more vulnerable backgrounds. Chile is one of the OECD countries

with the highest level of economic disparity (OCDE, 2011), and this is reflected in student performance at school. Low-SES students perform more poorly than those from high-SES schools (Mayol, Araya, Azócar, & Azócar, 2011; OCDE, 2016). Furthermore, the distribution of students across the different types of school (public, private-subsidised, and private) is very different to what is found in other countries. In Chile, the type of school each student attends is determined not randomly, but according to SES (González, 2017). In other words, low-SES children attend public schools (low-SES schools), while medium- and high-SES children attend private-subsidised or private schools (or medium-high-SES school) (Donoso & Arias, 2012). From the point of view of the Chilean education system, there is a need to establish the classification as the degree to which teacher expectations are biased is based on the type of institution in which they work. This, in turn, is linked to the socio-economic characteristics of the students.

### The influence of student and school SES and gender on teacher expectations

Student SES and gender are factors that may affect both teacher expectations and, in turn, students' academic achievement (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008; Barbarin & Aikens, 2015). In a review of results from studies into SES conducted over the past 35 years, Jussim and Harber (2005) found that the effect of teacher expectations on student performance is, to a large extent, explained by social variables. In particular, these studies' findings suggest that students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds are considered by their teachers to have a less promising future than those students with more favourable socio-economic characteristics. These expectations might lead teachers to carry out differentiated educational practices, which will ultimately impact their students' academic achievement. For example, teachers who believe that their low SES students will not achieve the course learning outcomes, will set less demanding pedagogical goals for them in comparison to their high SES peers (Good & Lavigne, 2018; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001; Lavigne & Good, 2019; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006; Rubie-Davies, 2010).

In more recent studies conducted in the Netherlands, it has again been confirmed that students' socio-economic characteristics play an important role in teacher attitude, shaping expectations of their students (e.g., de Boer, Bosker, & van der Werf, 2010; Speybroeck et al., 2012). More specifically, teachers generally have lower expectations of low-SES students, and these low expectations may have a