Evolution of socioemotional skills in higher education

Evolución de las habilidades socioemocionales en la educación superior

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Abstract

Objective: Provide an approximation on the evolution of socio-emotional skills as part of the educational competencies to be developed in higher education.

Methodology: This is the product of bibliographical research carried out with a holistic approach, focused on a process that helped explain the origin, legal bases and importance of the development of socio-emotional skills in young people who study higher education, as part of the competencies to acquire at this educational level.

Contribution: Socio-emotional skills are extremely important because thanks to them it is possible to consolidate healthy personal and/or professional relationships, as well as the construction of solid environments and internal and community well-being. Its purpose is to provide an approximation of the evolution of socio-emotional skills as part of the educational competencies to be developed in higher education. To elaborate this, a process of collecting bibliographic information carried out with a holistic approach was used, a procedure that allowed explaining the origin, progress, legal bases and importance of the development of these skills in young people who study higher education, as part of the skills to be acquired at this educational level.

Socioemotional skills, Youth, Higher education

Resumen

Objetivo: Brindar una aproximación sobre la evolución de las habilidades socioemocionales como parte de las competencias educativas a desarrollar en educación superior.

Metodología: El presente es producto de la investigación bibliográfica realizada con un enfoque holístico, centrado en un proceso que ayudó a explicar el origen, bases legales e importancia del desarrollo de las habilidades socioemocionales en jóvenes que estudian la educación superior, cómo parte de las competencias a adquirir en este nivel educativo.

Contribución: Las habilidades socioemocionales son de suma importancia debido a que gracias a ellas es posible que se consoliden relaciones personales y/o profesionales saludables, así como la construcción de entornos sólidos y de bienestar interno y comunitario. Tiene como propósito brindar una aproximación de la evolución de las habilidades socioemocionales como parte de las competencias educativas a desarrollar en educación superior, para elaborar el presente se utilizó un proceso de recolección de información bibliográfica realizada con un enfoque holístico, procedimiento que permitió explicar el origen, progresos, bases legales e importancia del desarrollo de estas habilidades en los jóvenes que estudian la educación superior, cómo parte de las competencias a adquirir en este nivel educativo.

Habilidades socioemocionales, Jóvenes, Educación superior

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Introduction

Talking about social-emotional skills in higher education is of vital importance, since human beings present situations that involve social relationships and emotional ties on a daily basis. For this reason, this paper presents a critical literature review on the background and theoretical and practical contributions of socioemotional skills, as well as the difference between social skills and emotional skills, which will allow the reader to identify each of them in order to highlight the importance of these in the development of the population of higher education students.

There are studies carried out by Argyle, Bryant and Trower in 1974 on social performance in university students, where it was observed that they present deficits in their social competence; these authors found that "from 10% to 30% of a sample of Oxford students presented great difficulties in common social situations such as approaching other people, going to discos, taking the initiative in a conversation, talking to people of the other sex, among others" (Herrera et al., 2012, p. 278).

Currently, we live in a complex and changing world, which requires young people with a solid academic background, as well as a strong development of socioemotional skills that allow them to successfully face the demands of the context in which they develop (Hernández, Trejo and Hernández, 2018, p. 88).

The importance of developing socioemotional skills with higher education students has been identified as essential for the proper functioning of students and future professionals. For this reason, it is necessary to highlight the importance of social competence in university students, as it constitutes an emerging professional class that has in social interaction the basis of its actions; in social sciences, "in psychology in particular, the interpersonal difficulties of students are even more critical, given the interpersonal nature of the performance and the object of study of these disciplines" (Herrera et al., 2012 p. 279).

Justification

Social-emotional skills are elemental for an individual to develop in a holistic and operationally functional manner. Through them, people achieve the necessary social reinforcements to be able to adapt to the immediate environment in which they develop. On the other hand, not having them generally leads to rejection and often even isolation, resulting in a very poor standard of living.

> "It is not enough to develop the knowledge and technical skills that prepare people for the development of work strictly and concretely linked to the object of their profession, it is necessary to foster a permanent disposition for the analysis and improvement of individual communicative behaviour" (Ordaz, 2013).

It is important to consider that although it is true that it is in the early stages of primary education that Social Skills (SSH) are acquired, "it is during the higher education stage when it becomes crucial to strengthen them for professional life, especially in careers where interpersonal relationships are part of the field of work" (Padilla et al., 2019, p. 71).

The ethical criteria of this research correspond to the critical reflection on the background, similarities, differences, contributions and limitations of the proposals found and the way in which the results are described on the subject of the challenges of socioemotional skills in higher education (Noreña, Moreno, Rojas, Rebolledo-Malpica, 2012). For this reason, it is considered important to make a theoretical journey that leads to the explanation, understanding and evolution of these skills throughout history.

Objective

To provide an approach to the evolution of socioemotional skills as part of the educational competences to be developed in higher education.

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Theoretical framework

- Social skills:

The study and determination of what social skills are began in the 1930s with a great variety of authors, such as Thorndike, Combs, Slaby, Alberti. Emmons, Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw, Klein, Anaya, Kelly, Monjas, Pelechano, Caballo, among others. At the beginning, social behaviours in children were studied, later in other areas, including from various psychological currents such as behaviourism and cognoscitivism.

> "HHSS (social skills) are defined from a behavioural model in which the explanation of human behaviour is based on the analysis of behaviour, the environment in which it takes place, personal variables and their interaction with each other" (Morán & Olaz, 2014, p. 94).

Currently, the importance of social skills in the development of human beings is widely described, however "there is still no universally accepted definition by all researchers, and there are numerous definitions that affect one or another characteristic of what constitutes socially skilled behaviour" (Gallego, 2009, p. 61).

Social skills are acquired through a process of learning and experience throughout life, which influences the behaviours and actions that the person has in their interpersonal relationships, so they form the repertoire of behaviours that allow them to perform functionally in the social sphere and are the basis of social competence (Del Prette and Del Prette, 2002).

It is essential to emphasise the development of social skills, as they are indispensable for adaptation to the environment in which they develop, as they can provide the necessary tools for good social development, in some cases becoming the key to survival.

From birth, human beings need to relate to others and participate in society, where values, norms and beliefs are involved; the social contexts in which they interact (family, work, school) help them to acquire and learn social skills.

"The deficit in the development of the HHSS lies in the maladjustment or difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships, since there are a series of negative consequences such as low social acceptance or social rejection, psychological maladjustment, emotional and academic problems and antisocial behaviour" (Bueno, Durán and Garrido, 2013 in Pulido and Herrera, 2014, p. 262).

The HHSS are a set of behaviours that allow the person to function functionally develop both in the social and professional spheres, which is why importance is given to the issue of social skills in university students, as they are defined as the basis of social competence, which students must face.

Different authors have pointed out the importance of having HHSS for the professional development of university students, "there are two types of competences that are indispensable for effective action and good professional performance, instrumental competences and social competences" (Gore, 1996 in Herrera, et al., 2012, p. 279):

- Instrumental competences refer to the specific skills that enable the individual to be more effective as a professional, and include short- and long-term time organisation, goal management, coping with problems and task-specific knowledge.

- Soft skills enable the individual to interact effectively on an interpersonal level in the workplace.

Unfortunately, there are few education curricula that include the development of social skills, and in some cases theoretical and methodological tools are not provided to address them, "sometimes finding themselves in situations of isolation and vulnerability reflected in a sense of lack of control and loneliness that can lead to a phenomenon such as depression and insecurity related to their personal integrity" (Ortiz & Beltrán, 2016, p. 2).

The need to improve interpersonal skills, manage stressful situations and enhance the well-being of healthcare staff has been identified as essential for the proper functioning of university students.

Castro (2004) mentions in a study conducted with university students that the basis for understanding the emotions of others is based on an adequate knowledge of one's own emotions, so that a person with a good understanding of their emotions extrapolates this knowledge to the interpersonal field.

Higher education should not only provide solid competences for the world of today and tomorrow, but also contribute to the formation of a citizenry endowed with ethical principles, committed to the construction of peace, the defence of human rights and the values of democracy (Ordaz, 2013).

Other studies show the case of the Health Sciences, where if students do not have a special initial level of social skills, the need for training to increase it becomes imperative and they declare the little effort that would be involved in integrating this subject into university studies (Villegas et al., 2018).

- Emotional skills:

For Villanueva, Clemente and Adrián, cited by Pérez, Filella and Soldevila, (2010) (1997), "all social interactions possess an emotional tone and all emotions experienced arise from the interaction of the subject with his or her environment". This statement emerges from the incorporation in the 1970s of the emotional component as a fundamental element of social competence. Since then, difficulties in interpersonal relationships have been explained as a result of a deficit in emotional skills - lack or poor repertoire - or as a consequence of a high level of conditioned anxiety or of interfering cognitions or emotions such as irrational ideas or beliefs, prejudices, etc.

For Goleman, Mckee, David, and Gallo (2017, p.58), "emotional intelligence is the result of a mixture of learned skills and natural talents, part genetic predisposition, part life experience and the result of some old lessons".

From a scientific point of view, emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive your own emotions and those of others (Goleman, et. al., 2017).

A person with high emotional intelligence can be realistic rather than optimistic, and insecure rather than confident. The danger is in assuming that because a person is optimistic and confident, they are also emotionally intelligent when, in fact, the presence of these characteristics says nothing about the rest (Goleman et. al., 2017).

For Bisquerra (2013), emotional education aims to develop emotional competences and well-being, it is based on the principle that well-being is one of the basic objectives of personal and social life, therefore, it has developed parallel to the interest in positive emotions, emotional well-being, flow, positive psychology, etc.

In the scientific literature we find clear evidence linking the constructs of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Social Skills (SS). We are currently in a position to state that there is a consensus that both competences correlate positively in both adolescents and adults (Pérez, Filella & Soldevila, 2010).

Emotions are immersed in the school environment and intervene in the way in which students learn, hence it has been pointed out that experiencing positive emotions could help them to solve problems, develop activities and favour self-regulation, however, if manifested in the opposite way, it would hinder their academic performance (Valencia, 2015, cited by Treviño, González and Montemayor, 2019).

Kelly (2002, p. 137), defines emotional skills as "those learned behaviours that people put into play in interpersonal situations to obtain or maintain reinforcement from the environment". Understood in this way, they can be considered as pathways or routes to an individual's goals.

For Zavala, Valadez and Vargas (2008), cited by Salazar, Mendoza and Muñoz (2020), emotional skills are observable behaviours, learned and used in social exchanges to obtain concrete ends, and are therefore susceptible to change, and therefore play a preponderant role in the individual's ability to face the challenges of adolescence, contributing to social acceptance.

There is evidence in different areas of the scientific literature that shows the importance of emotional skills in the success or failure of people when developing in society (Herrera et al., 2012, cited by Salazar, Mendoza and Muñoz, 2020).

"Emotional ability must be considered within a given cultural framework, communication patterns vary widely across cultures and within cultures, depending on factors such as age, gender, social class and education" (Caballo, 2007, p. 87).

The individual also brings to the situation their own attitudes, values, beliefs and cognitive abilities and a unique style of interaction, there can be no one right way to behave that is universal, but a number of different approaches that may vary according to the individual (Wilkinson and Canter, 1982, cited by Caballo, 2007).

Similarly, a number of definitions of social skills or socially skilled behaviour have been found, for example:

- The complete ability to engage in behaviours that are positively or negatively reinforced, and not to engage in behaviours that are punished or extinguished by others (Libet and Lewinsonhn, 1973, cited by horse in 2007).

- Interpersonal behaviour that involves the honest and relatively direct expression of feelings (Rimm, 1974, cited by Caballo, 2007).

- Behaviour that allows a person to act in his or her best interests, to defend himself or herself without inappropriate anxiety, to comfortably express honest feelings, or to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others (Albertí and Emmons, 1978, cited by Caballo, 2007).

It can then be said that, "socially skilful behaviour is that set of behaviours emitted by an individual in an interpersonal context that expresses feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions or rights of that individual in a way that is appropriate to the situation" (Caballo, 2007, p. 98).

- Social-emotional skills:

The term social-emotional skills or emotional learning is now used to refer to the tools that enable people to understand and regulate their emotions, understand the emotions of others, feel and show empathy for others, establish and develop positive relationships, make responsible decisions, as well as define and achieve personal goals. When they are referred to as skills they have the connotation of the possibility of their educability or trainability (Zavala, Trejo and Hernández, 2018, p. 88).

Articles 16 and 59 of the General Education Law (2019) state that the education provided by the State, its decentralised bodies and officially valid private institutions will be comprehensive because it will educate for life and will be focused on the development of capacities, cognitive, socio-emotional and physical skills in such a way as to achieve well-being and contribute to social development, acquire and generate knowledge, strengthen the ability to learn to think, feel, act as a member of a community and in harmony with nature.

Due to its importance, social-emotional education has been incorporated into the formal curriculum of compulsory education in Mexico, and "the National Educational Model has included social-emotional skills and the life project as a fundamental part of the graduation profile of students in Higher Secondary Education" (SEP, n.d. Quoted by Treviño, et al., 2019, p.8).

Treviño, González and Montemayor (2019), cite several authors, mentioning that socioemotional skills are necessary for learning (Villaseñor, 2018), in addition, they contribute to achieving better academic performance (Pahl & Barrett, 2007; SEP, n.d.) and make it possible to achieve successful employment trajectories (Murrieta, Ruvalcaba, Caballo and Lorenzo, 2014).

On the other hand; Zavala, Trejo and Hernández (2018) classify skills into three types:

1. Those that enable personal knowledge (self-knowledge and self-regulation).

2. Those that regulate relationships with others (social awareness and collaboration).

Those that help to choose and define goals (responsible decision making and perseverance).

Methodology

This is the product of bibliographical research carried out with a holistic approach, centred on a process that helped to explain the origin, legal bases and importance of the development of socioemotional skills in young people studying higher education, as part of the competences to be acquired at this educational level.

With the support of qualitative techniques as recommended by Londoño and Tabares (2002) for the collection and interpretation of the historical process experienced in relation to the origin and evolution of socioemotional skills and their development in higher education.

In the sequence of the holistic cycle of this research, the first five phases were put into practice in this process (Londoño and Tabares, 2002, p. 23), which in turn marked the procedure to be followed.

Exploratory: in which the analysis of the development of socioemotional skills in higher education students was defined within the range of possibilities.

Descriptive: a stage in which the theoretical references and models that would be integrated into this process were decided upon.

Comparative: in this stage, the antecedents were identified and reviewed, locating their similarities and differences.

Analytical: a moment dedicated to analysis and reflection, recognising the contributions and limitations of the theories and models analysed.

Explanatory: stage dedicated to the interpretation of results regarding the challenges of higher education for the development of socioemotional skills through the triangulation of information.

Results

Socioemotional skills are defined as learned behaviours that help us to relate to others, based on an understanding of our feelings and the feelings of others in order to make responsible decisions (Carbajal, 2020, para. 1).

Over the years, and particularly from the 1930s onwards, the study of social behaviours from different approaches such as behaviourism and cognoscitivism gained great importance; behaviours that are essential for the adaptation of the individual to the environment in which he/she develops, highlighting them for the adequate academic, social and professional functioning.

-   Social skills:

Contributions: In education their acquisition and strengthening is crucial for school life and in their professional case. Limitations: There is still no definition of social skills universally accepted by all researchers.

-   Emotional skills:

Contributions: They develop within a cultural framework and depend on factors such as age, gender, social class and education.

Limitations: For their development correlates genetic predisposition and experience.

-   Socio-emotional skills:

Contributions: they are not only developed for the benefit of academic activity but also for personal and working life.

They have the connotation of the possibility of their educability or training.

Limitations: The development of socioemotional skills is not yet included in the higher education proposals of many higher education institutions.

At first, social skills were analysed as a fundamental basis for development in the educational context, which becomes a model of reinforcement as well as interaction with peers (Jeraldiny, 2013). However, it was identified as necessary to foster a permanent disposition for the analysis and improvement of individual communicative behaviour (Ordaz, 2013).

The approaches from which the skills that enable better social performance are viewed have been evolving without leaving aside previous references. From the 1960s onwards, under the name of emotional skills, the term emotional was incorporated into the study of the behaviours developed by the individual in a social context that makes it possible to perceive one's own emotions and those of others and thus improve academic performance (Bisquerra, 2013).

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the term socioemotional skills was coined as the tools that allow people to be, live together and make responsible decisions. Due to their importance, they have been included in the educational model for upper secondary education (SEP, s/f, cited by Treviño, et al, 2019).

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Conclusions and recommendations

The development of socioemotional skills currently represents a challenge for higher education in Mexico, with the aim of enabling this population to face the future, whether in the workplace, academically or socially:

-   Integrating the development of socioemotional skills in educational institutions in our country.

-   Improving the skills of higher education students so that they are able to express their points of view, aspirations, feelings, rights, among others, with due respect for others.

-   That this population perceives itself as a member of a community and in harmony with nature.

-   That the management of socio-emotional skills is a strategic element for the employability of the student community graduating from higher education.

Recently, the Mexican Educational Model integrated the development of socioemotional skills, based on the General Law of Education, both in basic and compulsory education, but not in higher education (DOF., 2019). For this reason, it highlights the importance of including them in the training of higher education students. However, if any higher education institution includes them, it is on its own initiative. Likewise, the development of socioemotional skills during vocational training has positive implications for the work activity that young people carry out, either in parallel with their studies or upon completing their studies in higher education (Inter-American Development Bank, n.d., para. 1).

No conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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