

Social Skills of Higher Education Students in Times of a Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The present work is oriented to review research related to social skills developed by university students in times of covid-19 pandemic. Understanding the management and development of social skills in the process of social interaction is relevant in the university environment to obtain an adequate professional performance. Within the framework of the results, subcategories such as strategies for the development of social skills, interpersonal relationships, collaborative work and self-esteem emerged; all of them revealing that there are, visibly, young people with social deficiencies vulnerable to depressive states or lack of self-esteem. Among the conclusions it is highlighted that, as long as an efficient social development is achieved, at the same time, the student's integral growth will be reinforced; only in this way, the deficiencies in social skills will be overcome.

Keywords: social attitudes, competences, students, university, contagious disease.

Introduction

Nowadays, education in the world is immersed in great changes, both technological and social, and according to Martínez-Usarralde et al. (2019), the factors involved in this change prioritize academic success, leaving aside social success. Brilliant people are continuously observed in the social and professional world who confess not to have been involved in some activities that have allowed them to potentiate their social skills at the institutional level (Holst et al., 2017; Hasanahand&Mailk, 2020). In the current context, students manifest various degrees of stress related to academic, health and family problems with the impossibility of being able to cope with the situation due to lack of knowledge of strategies (Koçet al., 2018; Albakova et al., 2020). New knowledge leads to pay more attention to interpersonal relationship and communication skills; so necessary in this time of pandemic produced by Sars-Cov-2 virus.

Indeed, it is imperative to emphasize the development of social skills within the university environment as an element to emerge occupationally, those who are not trained will be suppressed from the labor market (OECD, 2018; Salazar et al., 2020). It should be noted that, in the European university dynamics, young people are more likely to perform efficiently in the workplace, but it is necessary to focus attention on the application of affective strategies to achieve success in life evidencing positive feelings (Bryndin, 2019). It is important to involve students in curricular activities that allow them to develop social skills and thus have greater opportunities in the workplace.

However, in Latin America there has been insufficient application of pedagogical programs related to the development of social skills in higher education environments. In this situation, the university assumes its determining role in the promotion of these skills in students so that they can develop adequately in their environment (Bustos-González, 2018; Huamán et al., 2020). Thus, in all the activities carried out by the university, the maximum attention should be placed on training the student to achieve the academic projects outlined. Recognizing that the main function of teachers is to train new generations. In this regard, Arteaga (2019) and López (2018) stated that, in addition to transmitting their knowledge, students should be encouraged to develop social skills that allow them to grow as integrated individuals. In that sense, universities in South America such as Colombia, Chile and Ecuador are involving in their curriculum extracurricular activities to promote social practices for the benefit of the student (Tapia-Gutierrez and Cubo-Delgado, 2017). Despite the great will of university institutions to achieve the improvement of the levels of social satisfaction of students; these are held back mainly by the discriminatory activity of certain sectors of society.

In Peru, the trend of the role of higher education teachers is focusing on the performance of students so that they can critically construct knowledge, guiding them to learning with an autonomous vision (López & González, 2018). In that sense, the strategies of affective order that the teacher imparts is determinant because it will affirm the social skills in students, which will later be embodied in the unfolding of their professional development (Gento et al., 2020). Indeed, in some private universities, the presence of students with great willingness to learn is evident, but these are overshadowed because they are exposed to humiliating practices by the university teacher (Díaz, 2019; Román, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to develop strategies to know the impact that causes pedagogical practices in the profile of university students and how it affects their social skills (Javier et al., 2019). The teaching work should be oriented to intervene in affective-emotional situations that involve the student; in this way, it favors the integral development of the student.

In the university context it was observed that in the professional training of students more interest is given to the academic aspect than to interpersonal relationships, causing dissatisfaction, stress, apathy, unhappiness, among other aspects; generating a poor development of social skills and directly affecting the integral development of their personality. main objective of the present work is oriented to review articles related to the social skills developed by university students in times of covid-19 pandemic.

In terms of social skills, human beings have a variety of innate abilities that are strengthened over time. These skills are defined as behaviors that manifest individuals and that are evidenced through interpersonal relationships (Caballo, 2007; Huambachano, 2018). It is relevant to point out that, thanks to interaction, the student is able to adapt his or her behavior, strengthening his or her bonds. Likewise, these skills are manifested as behaviors and through them they can express feelings to strengthen ties with those around him (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2018). It should be noted that one of the purposes for the development of social skills is to know how to convey feelings to strengthen ties and thus obtain achievements at a personal and social level (Cajas et al., 2020; Melgar et al., 2019). When referring to social skills, a set of behaviors are involved, which will allow the student to adequately develop within a social group. Therefore, when the student is in a reliable environment, a favorable development of his or her personality can be evidenced, acting assertively.

Studies on social skills are focused on theories that determine man's position in society. In this sense, Vigotsky (1978) proposes, based on the Socio-Historical theory, that the skills that a

person acquires from childhood are developed in the social environment. The human being from the first years of life is involved in interactions with other agents of society, which will help to know their cultural, historical and social environment. From the social learning model, it is argued that people who have a greater possibility of knowledge and active participation in a social environment can obtain achievements in a satisfactory way; because they will have a broader picture of the things that surround them (Bandura, 2002). It is necessary to highlight the proposal that orients in knowing aspects of the socialization process. This model contemplates, also, cultural and historical aspects in which the person develops in a sensible way strengthening his identity (Tortosa, 2018). It is worth noting that social skills allow reflecting the type of treatment that is manifested with the people in the environment and from this, it is possible to amend behaviors.

Likewise, people's ability to relate to others is different and particular in each case. In this sense, the cognitive model considers social skills to be central axes that help to adequately manage and mold the behavior of the individual in the face of the ends determined by society (Feuerstein et al., 1979). From this, the aim is to achieve changes in the way of interrelating with the external world, in addition to knowing how the student responds to the diversity of situations. Similarly, emotions in this context play a determining role in the way reality is perceived, the more positive situations that the person faces, the better perception he will have of his environment and vice versa (García, 2018). If students are taught to relate properly, they can obtain a successful development in terms of their social skills so necessary to be able to live in society.

In relation to the types of social skills, these are expressed through elements that characterize them. Among them, the behavioral element that includes the attitudes expressed by the person when they relate to people in their environment, focuses on communication (Flores et al., 2016). Likewise, the cognitive element is present, which considers all the information processing of the individual and includes thoughts and beliefs; finally, the physiological element, which considers the relationship between anxiety and the neural response to a particular situation (Jaramillo et al., 2020). Social skills are developed according to the context in which the student develops, hence the importance of their application from childhood, where all the elements of value and socio-affective are assimilated.

Methodology

The present study is a theoretical descriptive documentary research, where the data collection was organized and the documents on the thematic social skills in the period between 2016 and 2020 were analyzed, taking into account all the articles reviewed. In the same way, studies published in Latin American journals, in Spanish, English and Portuguese language were considered. The population consisted of all those documents on the topic raised in the database Ebsco, Redalyc, Scielo, Scopus, Web of science. The search criteria included keywords linked to the ERIC thesaurus, which were combined for a deeper search. Articles that were not related to the topic and/or those that were not published in indexed journals were not taken into consideration.

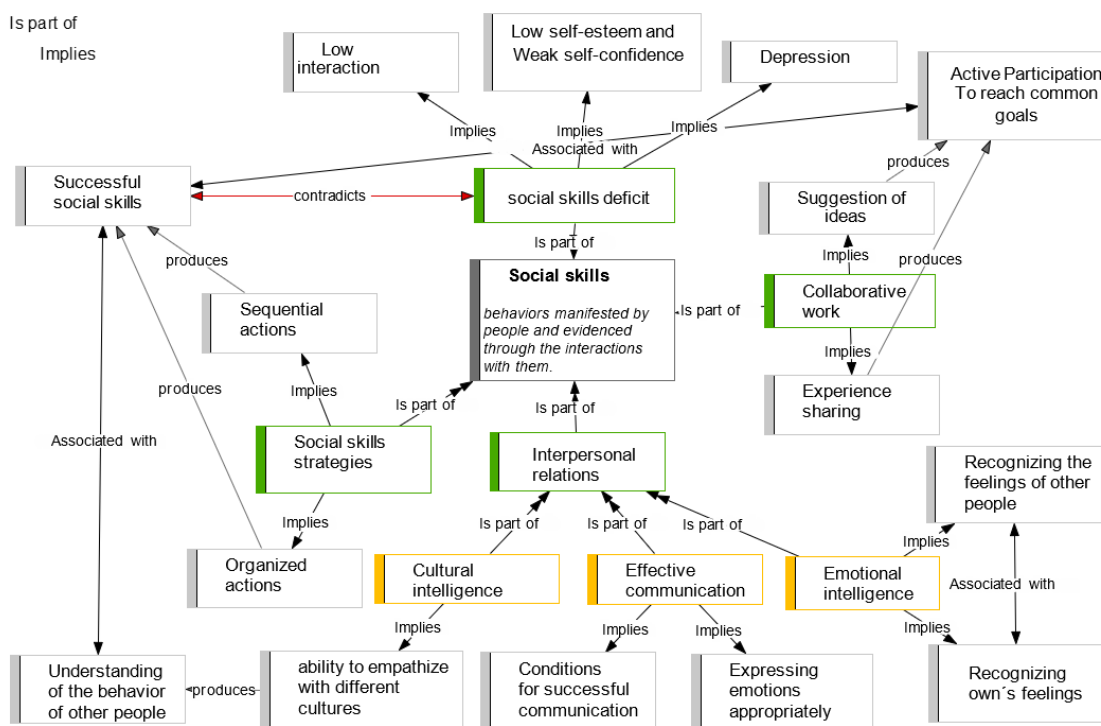


Figure 1. Semantic map of Social skills of university students in times of pandemic.

According to the analysis, it can be observed that social skills, understood as those interpersonal behaviors evidenced through relationships, allow to point out four emerging categories, such as social skills strategies, which are the set of actions in a way. On the other hand, the category of interpersonal relations emerges, which are expressions that show the way people relate to others, this implies *cultural intelligence* which can be understood as the ability to empathize with a diversity of cultures different from one's own; likewise, *emotional intelligence*, which implies an ability to control one's own feelings. There is also effective communication, which refers to the exploration of the conditions that make it possible for communication to be successful. Another emerging category was that of collaborative work, translated as that where a group of people actively participates to achieve common purposes. Finally, self-esteem considered as the valuation of oneself, related to self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

Results

Social Skills Strategies

The different tactics used to train in social skills are necessary in university interaction to promote the development of students. Strategies are considered to be the set of actions organized in a premeditated way whose objective is to successfully develop social skills (Delgado&Sánchez, 2018). Faced with this, teachers permanently reinforce their curricular and extracurricular activities to allow a better adaptation of the student. It is necessary to get involved in the academic work in order to strengthen social interactions and fluid cooperation among members of the educational community (Villar et al.,2018). Such interaction will allow a more satisfactory attitude with others increasing their social competences.

Also, for an adequate development of social skills, cultural activities must be considered, focused on knowing how the student develops with their immediate environment and how they perceive themselves during these interactions (Caldera et al., 2018). In that sense, situations are presented in the classroom, where students respond to a behavioral pattern that will allow an adequate adaptation to their environment and at the same time, they will be able to identify dysfunctional behaviors.

In turn, coping strategies that refers to problem solving are presented, these are essential to obtain an ideal development within the framework of interpersonal relationships, the student will be satisfied to successfully face all unexpected situations that arise within their academic activities (Alania, 2018;De AlmeidaandBenevides, 2018).The proposed strategy allows students to cope more effectively and preparedness with the different adverse situations that arise in the course of student coexistence. The promotion of social competencies is made possible through emotional education, allowing students to socialize by learning to control their emotions (Estrada et al., 2020). In this way, when the student experiences a problematic or high-pressure event, he or she will be able to respond in a coherent and assertive manner, acquiring, reflecting solidity in the formation of his or her personality.

Social Skills and Interpersonal Relations

Students, as social beings, seek to share meaningful situations in their daily lives. Interpersonal relationships are expressions that show how people relate to others (Flórez-Madroñero et al., 2020). Assertive behavior will allow an optimal identification with the group strengthened in the constant interaction. Therefore, in the interaction process three different behaviors that characterize the person are evident. In them, passive behavior stands out, where the individual chooses to move away from conflictive situations that demand confrontations, likewise, aggressive behavior that causes discomfort to another person, and assertive behavior, which is expressed in a coherent way, allowing the student to adapt easily to the university environment (Alonso, 2017;Núñezet al., 2018). It is relevant to mention that, as a determining condition to have an emotionally healthy life, social order skills should be developed.

In the same line, it will favor the process of adaptation of the student to perform extracurricular activities such as participation in sporting and social events; in this way they will develop attitudes and skills to successfully face their social life (Benevides et al., 2017; Naranjo et al., 2019). It is necessary to reinforce healthy interpersonal relationships and thus optimize their skills with the immediate environment strengthening the personality and integral development of the individual. In the same line, when interpersonal relationships are scarce or null they will affect the student's environment and the good climate of an organization (Pérez, 2017). Therefore, through these interactions the adaptation of the person to society will be reinforced; otherwise, it will cause a rejection promoting a poor quality of life.

Cultural intelligence.

The human being builds his own knowledge through various activities he performs with his environment. In this sense, when talking about cultural intelligence, it refers to the ability to empathize with a diversity of cultures different from our own, allowing to understand the behavior of each of the people who make it up (Canese, 2018). The idea emphasizes that throughout life individuals learn different concepts that go beyond their own cultural structure. It is specified that by

putting people's cultural intelligence into practice, it will naturally improve the purely social and cultural aspects, favoring the promotion of a healthier world.

The impact caused by the level of cultural intelligence on social skills will also have an impact on the development of students, improving the integration of students in teamwork (Koç, 2018). Thus, in order to establish a proper relationship between individuals, all kinds of beliefs that may cause strife should be put aside and thus mutual respect can be maintained to facilitate adaptation to the social environment. There is a new expectation in relation to cultural intelligence that includes the ability to understand cultural patterns in the decisions that are made day to day in the educational environment (Mudarra&Garcia-Salguero, 2016). Nowadays, due to the pandemic, there is greater cultural pressure; managing cultural intelligence properly will allow for closer social ties as well as to remain competitive in all levels of society.

Emotional intelligence.

The competences that mark the destiny of man is the one that corresponds to the emotional aspect. Thus, Goleman (2010) defines this intelligence as an ability to recognize feelings and emotions in the personal field as well as in the group field. It is important to cultivate positive feelings and properly handle each situation. In this way, successful results will be obtained in each social activity they are involved in. Students will have an adequate social development necessary for their lives to the extent that they have adequate knowledge about the management of their emotions (Trejo, 2020). Currently, emotional competence is very much taken into account especially in academic and work environments, where the way in which the individual perceives things and if they appropriately manage their feelings or attitudes are evaluated.

Recent studies show that individuals who express social skills in their different activities, present a more emotionally balanced personality. In this sense, as a product of a solid family dynamic, the student will be able to strengthen social relationships, showing more confidence to express emotions and feelings (Nesi&Trintin-Rodrigues, 2019). Family and friendship ties will mark a defined behavior in the person and in turn, will cause the strengthening of their emotions in the face of circumstantial events that evidence emotional maturity.

In certain family situations, it is essential to develop emotional creativity in order to maintain a balance, considering that the alteration in this area will affect the strengthening of social relationships and the proper development of the student. In this sense, the adequate perception of themselves will allow visualizing a required emotional intelligence (Esteves et al., 2020). It is necessary that the university student feels welcomed and integrated in the social group where he/she develops. In this way, he/she will be able to fulfill the academic objectives outlined for consolidating the social competences.

Effective communication.

To develop the communicative skills, certain elements are required to be effective. In this regard, effective communication refers to having the ability to explore different situations to make dialogue more efficient and useful (Véliz-Intriago, 2017). The cordial communication allows a healthy coexistence, improves the professional objectives outlined and favors teamwork. In that sense, it is necessary to adequately prepare students to apply communication skills in person as well as virtually, which is where they have a more frequent development (Guilló, 2017; Hernández- Jorgeand and De

la Rosa, 2018) In the last decade, the link through social networks has been strengthened and has allowed a new form of communication that becomes more captivating for students.

Teachers have to direct their interest in preparing students to communicate effectively and assertively, and in this way they can enjoy relating to their peers (Cabrera, 2019). Indeed, communicating not only involves communicating clearly, but also knowing how to listen to others. In that sense, making a gender distinction, research reports that men have greater criteria in their communication skills in relation to women, presenting more empathetic behaviors, less conflictive and seeking practical solutions in all circumstances of conflict (Holst, et al., 2017). In this sense, it is necessary to develop social skills in university life through mixed teams composed of men and women in order to have a successful and suitable communication, giving them a rewarding experience, as well as allowing them to manage different roles, which will promote favorable knowledge for life itself.

Social Skills and Collaborative Work

Nowadays, people are developing work focused on an academic exchange with the help of other people. Collaborative work is where a group of people actively participates by suggesting ideas, contributing their experience to achieve common goals (Cotán et al., 2020). Collaborative work defines the specific roles of each member and thus can consolidate an effective work with highly competitive results.

Nowadays, because of the confinement, a remarkable evolution in the distance context has become noticeable causing a greater academic flow as well as the opening to a community work to achieve the objectives at institutional level (Gutiérrez-Portlán and Román-García, 2018; Samia, 2020). Indeed, the development of collaborative work favors the performance of peers in various spaces of professional work, reflected in the degree of personal satisfaction. The competence linked to teamwork allows obtaining better results both collectively and personally, strengthening the character and leadership of students (García-Martín, et al., 2020). It is known that on many occasions not all members of a team perform equally, but in all cases the quality of the student's social life is improved.

During this time of forced quarantine, the skills that were most developed were collaborative work. Certainly, its application becomes significant as it allows students not only to increase their learning but also to develop attitudes and social skills with teachers and classmates (Villar et al., 2018). This type of activities favors harmonious participation for the achievement of the same work objectives. In turn, working collaboratively allows not only the improvement of social skills in general, but also favors the closer knowledge of the attitudes and aptitudes of team members overcoming obstacles together (Báez and Cadoche, 2019). These factors are determinants so that goals and objectives can be achieved in a more solid and efficient way.

Self-esteem in social skills

It is a reality that a large percentage of university students are not linked to good management skills, causing in most cases a weakened self-esteem. Self-esteem is determined by the valuation that one has of oneself, closely linked to the correct self-knowledge and healthy self-acceptance necessary to interact successfully with others (Konstanze et al., 2019). Conversely, when it is not developed properly, it will lead to weakness in social competencies and in severe cases low self-esteem would be developed one would be considering a depressive state that could lead to suicide. In this way,

when social skills have not been developed and therefore, the bond with others will be poorly expressed, causing a diversity of negative experiences as well as social isolation (Bolsoni-Silva & Loureiro, 2017; Vargas&Paternina, 2017).The poor interaction with peers in the classroom and outside it, is indicative of a behavior with traits of low self-esteem and a very weakened self-confidence, subject to the perception of the group.

The lack of social skills is related to the appearance of personality disorders. The absence of social interaction hinders the correct formation of identity and is directly related to the dropout of university students (Tacca et al., 2020). Collaborative work is required between the various educational bodies to strengthen social skills and in this way, students can issue opinions without any kind of prejudice. Discrimination is considered one of the great social problems and through which it is determined whether social behavior is suitable to reinforce self-concept in people or could be conducive to cause irreparable damage to their socio-emotional development (Estrada, 2019). The results estimate that in many opportunities students have the willingness to participate in various activities both intra and extracurricular, but they are inhibited by the increased anxiety produced by themselves.

Thus, when an adequate development of social skills in university students does not thrive, there is a risk that they will lose the ability to manage self-control, to act efficiently to resolve conflicts, increasing their stress, causing future problems in their social role and a failure in academic activity. Such is the importance in the human being of knowing how to get involved socially that the WHO (2006) catalogs it as life skills, necessary to meet the requirements demanded by society. For this reason, it is advisable to have a healthy life, practice sports, prevent risky sexual behaviors, promoting positive attitudes that will have an impact for the good of society (Felgueras-Custodio et al., 2020). The absence of these requirements in the lives of students irremediably causes high levels of depression; hence the importance of implementing social activities in educational institutions.

Conclusions

The reviewed studies consider the university, in this time of pandemic, as a center of academic formation, as well as the right place to promote social environments that favor the correct development of the student in each of the areas of action, contributing to their integral formation and projecting a competent professional profile according to the requirements of this time.

Social skills are necessary for the good management of interpersonal relationships, because they allow to generate a great number of capacities and competences that will facilitate to obtain benefits in different situations.

With regard to the general education of young university students, it is advisable to implement programs to promote adequate development of social skills and, at the same time, to allow professional and personal development. When social skills are strengthened, respect for others is accentuated and companionship is strengthened, leading to a more solid socialization.

In order to achieve successful social skills, it is necessary to understand the course of the university student's life, to know their personal and social environment, to know their reality and, based on this, to execute actions with the responsible professionals, thus involving all the educational agents. Young university students, who underwent a drastic change in the context of the pandemic, have knowledge, perceptions and experiences that allow them to reflect on their dynamics of social interaction and ways of life. But they also have personal and collective resources that enable them to act in their daily lives as agents of social change, multipliers of peace.

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