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Abstract

The entry into Higher Education means the realization of a dream for many people, but along with this achievement difficulties can arise, lack of information on the functioning of the university and expectations that do not match the reality of this context. The new environment can represent a difficult time to have to adapt to deal with criticism, overcome family distance, frustration with some expectations and establish new interpersonal relationships. Students are often surprised by new situations that occur during the course of early academic life and may feel threatened by changes inherent in the university experience. Although the literature recognizes the importance of the construct Social Skills, research in this context reveals difficulties in integrating Assertive Social Skills and Problem Solving that are required in any profession full of interpersonal demands. The present chapter sought to highlight the impact of Assertive Social Skills in Problem Solving in beginning students. The findings contribute positively to the understanding of the process of adjustment to the university context, as they expand the perception of the difficulties experienced by students in academia. In general, we highlight the need for future research that can influence institutional proposals and public policies that strengthen the experience of students and improve training processes in this area.

Keywords: social skills, university, higher education, problem solving, creativity

1. Introduction

When entering Higher Education most students face different challenges, such as dealing with new relationships and adjusting to new requirements. These challenges configured by the university context can be exhausting to the point of generating physical and emotional exhaustion of the student. This recent and complex atmosphere can be perceived by undergraduates as a scenario that requires behavior changes. This applies to the understanding of new ways to be evaluated, to follow different methodologies and to receive new content [1], in the act of corresponding to the interpersonal relationships required throughout the training [2] understanding of the expansion of autonomy to test new experiences [3].

In order to manage these difficulties, national and international statistics point out that living with the adversities of the first year in the academic context is critical when
students are disposed of cultural and economic resources, even for a limited period to respond satisfactorily. Thus, incoming students are unaware of the new dynamics of the third degree and are often the first family members to attend university, they need special attention from educational institutions, teachers and support programs [4].

2. Ability to solve social problems of university students

According to some authors [5, 6], the difficulties encountered by students in the early periods of graduation can cause discomfort and difficulties. The obstacles to be overcome include adaptation problems to psychosocial disorders that can lead to academic evasion [7, 8]. In this sense, this theoretical study aims to show how the Assertive Social Skills and Problem Solving are crucial to handle conflicting situations that go beyond theoretical and technical knowledge during the university course. In view of this, it can be said that the promotion of Assertive Social Skills has been pointed out as a protective portfolio in improving the quality of life of students, since they are elements considered facilitators of these difficult situations.

To illustrate the theme discussed here, the study [9] aimed to identify the relationship between resilience, coping, social skills and problem solving and comparing the aforementioned constructs in Psychology students and other students from other related areas to outline an overview of how students solve problems. When studying students, it was noticed that the students of Psychology had deficits in Social Skills in relation to university students of other courses. This may mean that Psychology students are not prepared to deal with conflict, assist in decision making and have relational difficulties. The results showed differences on how university students face their adversities thus favoring the discussion of the training of undergraduates. These notes corroborate the research that supports that the formation of university students should favor the development of social skills in interpersonal relationships for problem solving since social skills are identified as a good variable social adjustment, development of interpersonal difficulties.

Another construct that was also intended to relate these constructs was Almeida Santos and Soares [10]. The authors aimed to identify the impact of Social Skills in solving problems in university psychology. He demonstrated in his results that the way of coping with problems and the Social Skills together explained how students solve their social problems, that is, students who had an elaborate repertoire of social skills along with cognitive/behavioral effort to regulate and manage problem situations, improved their overall ability in decision making.

The concept of Social Skills (SH) can be understood as different classes of social behaviors that help individuals face the processes of interpersonal interaction [11]. In turn assertiveness is an ability to confront, defend rights and express thoughts in a direct, honest and appropriate way, which does not violate the rights of another person and can be considered a skill of communication and social interaction [12]. Therefore, it is understood that the HS classes presented in Del Prette and Del Prette [13] cover communication, assertiveness, conflict management and resolution of interpersonal problems. Thus, the individual who has an elaborate portfolio of Social Skills, will probably have built a repertoire of behaviors, which can serve as support in difficult times.

Given the recognition that HS frequency measures are insufficient for a broad analysis of the multidimensionality of the concepts of skills and social competence, Teixeira [14], developed a multimodal instrument to analyze assertive skills. The instrument includes the achievement of indicators of antecedents and consequents
of a social performance, thus allowing analysis of the circumstances and effects of social performances on interactions. Instruments of this nature expand the conditions for evaluating social performance and, according to the author, contribute to a better behavioral characterization, and to the planning and evaluation of intervention programs in HS. The author also highlights the potential of the instrument for the use articulated with the theoretical and applied knowledge of the behavioral analytical approach. In addition to this advantage, by raising the antecedents and consequences of a social performance, the instrument enables the capture of the participant’s knowledge about situational conditions and values of culture, as well as the assessment of compliance with the criteria of social competence based on the impacts of the consequences on each interlocutor.

Given the interpersonal nature of the student, it is evident, the need for development and improvement of social skills beyond the learning of academic content. The management of social relations in the academic context related to technical competence is pointed out as a criterion for good performance of the university student [15]. These same authors consider that the practice of these skills should be interactive to facilitate the development of people's interpersonal skills and not only restrict the technical qualification. Scholars [16] of the area of Social Skills complement showing that third degree training should articulate both technical and social competence, with mastery of specific techniques, theoretical knowledge that subsidizes critical thinking and social performance that meets different social demands. Thus, it is understood that social competence is considered as an important criterion for the student's performance.

Furthermore, the ability to Problem Solving can be used to deal with the perceived excessive demands resulting from situations of emotional discomfort. Thus, it can be inferred that, regardless of the academic moment, the student will face unexpected situations, reinforcing the need for the development of creativity and a repertoire of Assertive Social Skills satisfactory to solve adverse situations. Problem-solving skills are poorly studied in college students in general, and can be defined by a meta-cognitive process that covers understanding the nature of the problem in which the student identifies, discover or elaborate effective or adaptive strategies to face social problems present in daily life [17]. In general, problem solving involves coping and cognitive/behavioral effort to regulate emotion and manage situations [18] as well as directing efforts to deal with interpersonal situations.

It is notorious that the third degree implies directly in the interpersonal relationships of the student public, especially in Problem Solving, in dealing with interpersonal problems related to the community and society [19]. Fang et al. [20] in a study on the problem-solving ability of nursing students, sample of 681 participants from Chinese universities and used the Inventory of Social Problem Solving in the reduced version and adapted to the Chinese reality. The group with specific training in Critical Thinking showed negative problem-solving results compared to the group without training. The authors concluded that social problem-solving skills vary according to the strategies employed in the teaching-learning process and suggest that self-directed, problem-based learning can be effective in improving the ability to social problems. These same authors also suggest that knowing psychosocial characteristics present in undergraduates can help universities in building preventive strategies to improve the social ability to solve problems of these students. Psychosocial characteristics are the thoughts, feelings and actions that appear more intensely in relationships and in the possible difficulties experienced, in this case, in the academic context.
Given that social competence is crucial for student development and when considering the requirements and challenges of the university context, Seco et al. [21] proposed Programs of Training of Transversal Competencies carried out with the beginning students of the Higher Education aiming to favor the integration to the institution and to develop Social Skills. These authors indicate the demand to contemplate students with the development of individual, emotional and social skills, while taking into account family relationships and involvement in activities that enable the development of interpersonal skills. However, these interpersonal relationships established in the university context can provoke reactions of emotional discomfort, feeling of rejection, dissatisfaction with the contents and even difficulties in the learning process [22]. Given this concern, the study of Soares et al. [15] sought to identify how university students perceive their experiences in interpersonal situations in the academic space. The results allowed to verify the student’s difficulties in dealing with interpersonal relationships (especially regarding the teacher/student relationship and the teacher’s didactics).

In another study, Soares et al. [23] identified the perceptions of 12 university students from a public university regarding the interpersonal relationships established with students, teachers, managers and employees. The conclusions made it possible to confirm that such relationships are perceived as unsatisfactory regarding the relationships between student/student, student/teacher and student/employee. These last results also indicated that the relationship between students/managers is satisfactory, since the interactions showed behaviors of civility, empathy and assertiveness, essential factors for the area of social skills. Thus, the study indicated, as a result of its results, that a better academic adaptation could be favored with the acquisition of assertive skills to deal with teachers, managers and employees at the University [24].

From the perspective of making students acquire more social skills in university interpersonal situations of interpersonal relationships, Lima and Soares [25] structured a training of social skills from situations considered difficult in the academic context. This analysis aimed to favor the confrontation of arduous situations, having as objectives the acquisition of social skills by university students; the strengthening of already existing social skills and the extinction of competing behaviors in a preventive character. The study of these authors included the participation of 11 university students from public and private institutions of Higher Education in the State of Rio de Janeiro. In addition to relational skills, the university context requires autonomy in solving academic demands, such as meeting schedules, attendance in classes, internships and conducting evaluations. Therefore, these needs can characterize a difficult time and many challenges, as they will have to demonstrate responsibility and proper relationship so that they can make decisions in order to solve their problems.

Reflections on problem-solving skills in university students motivated a correlational-descriptive study [26], which aimed to verify the relationship between the mental health of undergraduate students (Medical Science, Human, Agriculture, Engineering and Art) with the resolution of social problems. With a sample of 369 university students, data analysis showed that the difficulty of solving social problems was significantly negatively associated with somatic symptoms, such as anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. In this direction, having the ability to solve social problems enables an analysis of choices, which enables university students to effectively implement coping strategies to deal with problems and demands of everyday life. Problem solving increases the likelihood of coping adaptation and reduces the everyday difficulties of life [27]. Solving problems involves coping and cognitive effort to regulate emotion and manage situations, which leads us to define coping strategies.
These strategies can have different styles, for example, the problem-focused, which is understood as an effort to modify the situation that originated stress, emotion, which are defined as the effort to regulate the emotional state and social support, that concerns the support of other people, because it is expected for solutions that are independent of the action of the individual [28]. In addition, coping strategies have an impact on the individual's quality of life. In general, students of both sexes differ in perceived ability to deal with problems. Possible determinants, for example, age, sex, religion, college and academic performance, may influence the development of problem coping capacity [29].

3. Conclusion

Although there is an expectation that the future professional responds positively to the interactive demands of their performance, after academic training, faces the difficulty in properly handling the processes of interpersonal interaction. Thus, it is pertinent to identify the interpersonal difficulties of university students in practice and in this sense, the study of Santos and Soares [30] reiterates that assertive social skills can explain the solution of students' problems to deal with the adversities of the university context, as well as identify effective ways to solve the problems experienced by students. However, to be able to really effective interventions in improving deficits found in the academic environment, is important, initially, the improvement of Social Skills in university students as a requirement for the learning process and important stage for the career development of every professional.

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