Emotional skills in students from a rural university in Peru

Habilidades emocionales en estudiantes de una universidad rural del Perú

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to evaluate the emotional skills of students from a rural university in Peru. A non-experimental design was used, analyzing the variable in its natural context without the intervention of the research team. The research was developed under a cross-sectional, prospective and descriptive approach. The population was made up of 1,258 students enrolled in the 2024-I semester, from which a sample of 294 participants was selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. For data collection, the survey technique was used, applying a questionnaire specifically designed to assess emotional skills. The results revealed that 53.1% (156 students) stated that their emotional skills require improvement; 36.7% (108 students) reported having adequate skills, and only 10.2% (30 students) indicated having highly developed emotional skills. It is concluded that most students have a low level of emotional skills, especially in aspects such as perception, expression and regulation of emotions. These findings show the need to strengthen emotional development within the academic field, in order to promote well-being and improve student performance.

Keywords: emotional skills, academic development, emotional regulation.

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo evaluar las habilidades emocionales en estudiantes de una universidad rural del Perú. Se empleó un diseño no experimental, analizando la variable en su contexto natural sin intervención del equipo investigador. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque transversal, de tipo prospectivo y descriptivo. La población estuvo conformada por 1.258 estudiantes matriculados en el semestre 2024-I, de los cuales se seleccionó una muestra de 294 participantes mediante muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia. Para la recolección de datos, se utilizó la técnica de la encuesta, aplicando un cuestionario diseñado específicamente para evaluar las habilidades emocionales. Los resultados revelaron que el 53.1 % (156 estudiantes) manifestó que sus habilidades emocionales requieren mejora; el 36.7 % (108 estudiantes) reportó contar con habilidades adecuadas, y solo el 10.2 % (30 estudiantes) indicó tener habilidades emocionales altamente desarrolladas. Se concluye que la mayoría de los estudiantes presenta un nivel bajo de habilidades emocionales, especialmente en aspectos como la percepción, expresión y regulación de las emociones. Estos hallazgos evidencian la necesidad de fortalecer el desarrollo emocional dentro del ámbito académico, con el fin de promover el bienestar y mejorar el rendimiento estudiantil.

Palabras clave: habilidades emocionales, desarrollo académico, regulación emocional.

Introduction

The development of emotional skills is recognized as a crucial factor for the academic, personal, and professional success of university students. These skills encompass the ability to recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions, as well as those of others. In the university context, particularly in rural institutions, these competencies take on an even more significant role due to the specific challenges faced by students in these environments, such as geographical isolation, limited opportunities for social interaction, and restricted access to psychological support services or counseling. These factors can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and difficulties in adapting to academic demands, underscoring the need to develop emotional skills to effectively address these obstacles.

As noted by Mayer et al. (2004), emotional intelligence not only enhances well-being but also directly correlates with improved academic performance. Students with a greater capacity to manage their emotions are more likely to effectively confront the pressures of exams, workloads, and social interactions—common situations in university life. In this sense, emotional skills enable students to face adversity with resilience and maintain a balance between academic demands and their mental health.

Loor & Solis (2024) argue that socio-emotional competencies are fundamental to the holistic development of university students, as this phase involves not only academic preparation but also personal and professional growth. Additionally, considering that university students are a population particularly vulnerable to emotional disorders due to various pressures, it is essential to implement both curricular and extracurricular prevention and intervention strategies.

In the national context, higher secondary and tertiary education represents a critical stage for the emotional development of young people, prompting institutions to adopt measures in response to the increasing prevalence of emotional and behavioral issues. Therefore, higher education plays a key role in the comprehensive formation of students and in preventing the risks associated with the onset and persistence of these problems. Learning and Service programs have thus been identified as effective strategies. Furthermore, courses in the curriculum and academic tutoring programs play an important role in teaching and training students, as well as in preventing emotional difficulties. According to Hernández Suárez et al. (2022), it is necessary to promote professional training that is aware of the specific roles students play in fields such as education and to foster appropriate attitudes outside the school environment. Particularly, the importance of a scientific education focused on professional areas that supports students from early developmental stages is emphasized.

On the other hand, rural universities, often located in remote areas, present particularities that differentially affect their students compared to urban institutions. According to Jackson & Soderlund (2013), geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure can create a sense of disconnection among students, impacting both their academic performance and emotional well-being. In light of these limitations, not only academic competencies but also robust emotional skills are required to tackle the unique challenges of the environment. In this context, emotional resilience—defined as the capacity to adapt and recover from adversity—becomes key, enabling students not only to endure difficulties but also to thrive in a less favorable setting.

Supporting this idea, Goleman (1995) asserts that emotional intelligence can be more important than IQ in predicting success in life. This statement highlights that emotional competencies play a decisive role in personal and professional success, especially when environmental conditions are challenging. In fact, studies suggest that students with high emotional intelligence are better at managing stress, resolving conflicts, and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships, resulting in greater satisfaction in both academic and personal life (Parker et al., 2004).

The rural environment also presents characteristics that require a particular approach. According to a study by Hinton and Naylor (2017), students at rural universities often have limited access to social networks and professional support, increasing the need for emotional skills to manage loneliness and infrequent social interaction. The ability to self-regulate emotions and maintain a positive attitude is, therefore, crucial in preventing emotional isolation and fostering a sense of belonging within the university community.

Strengthening these emotional skills in students at rural universities is, consequently, essential not only for improving academic performance but also for promoting overall well-being. Support for emotional intelligence could, for example, include the implementation of emotional education programs that help students develop competencies in stress management, decision-making, and empathy. As Ciarrochi et al. (2002) conclude, “the teaching of emotional intelligence should be an integral part of educational programs, as it fosters the development of a more resilient and cohesive community.”

In light of the above, it is evident that the development of emotional skills in rural educational contexts is a fundamental factor in ensuring the well-being and academic success of students. By promoting environments that support these competencies, rural institutions not only enhance the quality of education they offer but also contribute to closing the existing gaps with urban universities.

This study, focused on evaluating the emotional skills of students at a rural university in Peru, underscores the importance of identifying and addressing their emotional needs to ensure their overall well-being and academic performance. By prioritizing the development of these competencies, rural universities strengthen their educational mission and promote greater equity in access to educational opportunities.

Methodology

The research was conducted under the conceptual principles of a non-experimental design, in which the variable was analyzed in its natural context without direct intervention from the researchers. It was a cross-sectional and prospective study, as data collection occurred at a single point in time, and the information was generated subsequent to the initiation of the research process.

The research approach was descriptive, aiming to characterize the emotional skills of students at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja during the semester 2024-II. The study population consisted of all registered students at the university in 2024, totaling 1,258 individuals. The sample was selected using non-probabilistic convenience sampling and comprised 294 students.

Data collection was conducted using a survey technique, employing the Emotional Skills Questionnaire (ESCQ-21), which had previously been validated and standardized by Vázquez et al. (2022) in their study on the Validation of the ESCQ-21 Questionnaire in Mexican Adolescents. Since the instrument had established validity and reliability, there was no need to repeat these processes in the current study. The questionnaire consists of 21 items with five response options (always, almost always, sometimes, almost never, and never), following a summative and evaluative approach.

For interpreting the results, a value scale was applied that classifies the level of emotional skills into three categories: highly developed (78 to 105 points), adequate (50 to 77 points), and needing improvement (21 to 49 points).

Results

The results obtained from the study on the emotional skills of students are presented down below. Through the analysis of the data collected via the emotional skills questionnaire, the aim is to provide a clear view of the current state of these competencies within the student population. The results are organized into tables reflecting both the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and the evaluation of their emotional skills across various dimensions, offering a framework to understand the need for intervention in this area.

Table 1

Characterization of students at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja, semester 2024-II.

Sociodemographic characteristics	N°	%
Age group:		
Less than 21 years	194	65.9
Between 21 to 25 years	92	31.3
Over 25 years	08	2.8
Total	294	100.0
Gender:		
Male	159	54.0
Female	135	46.0
Total	294	100.0
Professional School:		
Nursing	83	28.2
Civil Engineering	53	18.1
Food Industry Engineering	44	14.9
Environmental Engineering	42	14.3
Industrial Engineering	72	24.5
Total	294	**100.0**

In Table 1, regarding sociodemographic characteristics, of the total students analyzed (N = 294), 65.9% (n = 194) were under 21 years old; 31.3% (n = 92) were between 21 and 25 years; and 2.8% (n = 8) were over 25 years. Concerning gender, 54.0% (n = 159) were male and 46.0% (n = 135) were female.

Regarding professional school affiliation, 28.2% (n = 83) were from Nursing; 24.5% (n = 72) from Industrial Engineering; 18.1% (n = 53) from Civil Engineering; 14.9% (n = 44) from Food Industry Engineering; and 14.3% (n = 42) from Environmental Engineering. These data provide a clear view of the sociodemographic composition of the student sample, highlighting significant variations in age, gender, and academic specialization.

Table 2

Emotional skills of students at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja

Emotional skills	N°	%
Highly developed	30	10.2
Adequate	108	36.7
Needs improvement	156	53.1
Total	294	100.0

Of the 294 students who participated in the study, 53.1% (n = 156) showed areas for improvement in their emotional skills. In contrast, 36.7% (n = 108) demonstrated emotional skills at an adequate level. Only 10.2% (n = 30) exhibited a level of emotional development classified as highly advanced. This information reveals that most students need to enhance their emotional skills, while a significant proportion shows an adequate level in this regard. Lastly, a small group of students has achieved a high degree of emotional development, highlighting the diversity of emotional skill levels within the analyzed student population.

Table 3

Emotional skills in the dimension of perceiving and understanding among students at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja

Dimension of perceiving and understanding	N°	%
Highly developed	28	9.5
Adequate	106	36.1
Needs improvement	160	54.4

Total	294	100.0

Among the 294 students involved in the study, 54.4% (equivalent to 160 students) showed areas for improvement in their emotional skills. Conversely, 36.1% (represented by 106 students) demonstrated emotional skills at an adequate level. Lastly, only 9.5% (corresponding to 28 students) exhibited a level of emotional development categorized as highly advanced. These results emphasize the prevalence of areas needing improvement in most participating students' emotional skills, while a significant proportion demonstrated an adequate level in this aspect. Additionally, a small group of students achieved a high degree of emotional development, evidencing the diversity of emotional skill levels within the analyzed student population.

Table 4

Emotional skills in the dimension of expressing and labeling among students at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja

Dimension of expressing and labeling	N°	%
Highly developed	26	8.8
Adequate	107	36.4
Needs improvement	161	54.8
Total	294	100.0

Among the 294 students who participated in the study, 54.8% (equivalent to 161 students) showed areas for improvement in their emotional skills. In contrast, 36.4% (represented by 107 students) demonstrated emotional skills at an adequate level. Only 8.8% (equivalent to 26 students) exhibited a level of emotional development classified as highly advanced. These findings underscore the presence of areas for improvement in the emotional skills of the majority of analyzed students, while a significant proportion demonstrated an adequate level in this aspect. Lastly, a small group of students has achieved a high degree of emotional development, highlighting the diversity of emotional skill levels present in the studied student sample.

Table 5

Emotional skills in the dimension of managing and regulating among students at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Tayacaja

Dimension of managing and regulating	N°	%
Highly developed	32	10.9
Adequate	108	36.7
Needs improvement	154	52.4
Total	294	100.0

Of the 294 students who took part in the study, 52.4% (equivalent to 154 students) presented areas for improvement in their emotional skills. In contrast, 36.7% (represented by 108 students) demonstrated emotional skills at an adequate level. Finally, 10.9% (32 students) exhibited a level of emotional development classified as highly advanced. These results highlight the existence of areas for improvement in the emotional skills of most participating students, while a significant proportion demonstrated an adequate level in this aspect. Additionally, a small group of students has achieved a high degree of emotional development, emphasizing the variety of emotional skill levels present in the analyzed student population.

Discussion

Emotions are considered a source of cognitive information that allows humans to interact safely and effectively with their environment. They can be described based on the evaluation of stimuli linked to a specific event. Thus, when a situation arises that may have positive or negative consequences for a person, they evaluate it based on their personal relationship with the event, weighing benefits and costs. This evaluation leads to a series

of reactions known as “dietoric” sensors, which are oriented toward a cost-benefit analysis that guides decision-making. According to Mora Guerrero et al. (2023), this relationship and the role of the emotional correlate characterize the affective dimension, which is introduced in this study as a determining aptitude in academic performance.

Similarly, a significant factor linked to the affective process of emotions is reasoning, which directly influences decision-making. There is a widespread tendency for individuals to evaluate situations or possible actions based on some cost-benefit criterion. This relationship has been considered indicative of how information is processed. In cases where analysis involves high cognitive effort, intense and less desirable emotional reactions tend to occur; conversely, when emotional processing relies on automatic or unreflective responses, it may develop superficially without formal logical mediation (Cepeda & Mahecha, 2022).

Therefore, Moncayo et al. (2023) agree that emotional skills play a fundamental role in the comprehensive development of students, constituting an essential component for quality education. These skills positively influence areas such as teamwork, leadership, and the teaching-learning process, justifying the need for universities to promote their development within an integral education framework. However, the findings of this study reveal that, in practice, higher education institutions still do not provide sufficient opportunities to effectively strengthen these competencies.

In this regard, Quesada and De Jesús (2024) highlight that emotional education has gained increasing prominence within the educational field, although its implementation depends not only on plans and programs but also on the level of knowledge and awareness that teachers have regarding its importance. According to the results of this study, this knowledge among faculty appears to be limited. Therefore, this information becomes crucial, as it emphasizes the urgency for both teachers and students to be trained, updated, and acquire the necessary competencies to make emotional education a cornerstone of personal, social, and professional development.

In light of the current situation, Feldfeber et al. (2024) suggest that, with the support of relevant authorities, guidelines, practices, work projects, guest lectures, reflection circles, workshops, and programs for emotional, psychological, and personal support focused on these skills could be established. Furthermore, institutions at local, state, and national levels could benefit from designing training pathways aimed at emotional development, ensuring job opportunities, dialogue spaces, and strengthening the emotional component within both formal and non-formal educational systems. This is particularly relevant in the university context, but also in educational levels such as high school and even basic education.

Conclusions

From the analyzed data in Table 1, it is concluded that the majority of students (65.9%) are under 21 years old, indicating a predominantly young student population. Only a small percentage (2.8%) exceeds 25 years. Regarding gender, there is a relatively equitable distribution, with a slight male majority (54.0%); concerning the professional school, the majority of students come from the Nursing program (28.2%), followed by Industrial Engineering (24.5%) and Civil Engineering (18.1%). The programs of Food Industry Engineering (14.9%) and Industrial Engineering (14.3%) show similar participation.

In terms of emotional development, the results reflect that a majority of students (53.1%) present emotional skills that require improvement, while 36.7% demonstrate an adequate level and only 10.2% have optimally developed these skills. These findings underscore the importance of fostering emotional development within the academic context. Regarding the dimension of perceiving and understanding emotions, more than half of the students (54.4%) have skills that need improvement, 36.1% possess an adequate level, and only 9.5% have reached optimal development. This suggests the need to implement effective strategies that strengthen emotional perception and understanding in educational environments.

In the dimension of expressing and labeling emotions, the results are similar: 54.8% of students need to improve these skills, 36.4% are at an adequate level, and only 8.8% demonstrate optimal development. This situation highlights the importance of reinforcing competencies related to emotional expression, which are fundamental both academically and personally.

Finally, in the dimension of managing and regulating emotions, 52.4% of students need improvement, 36.7% show an adequate level, and only 10.9% have reached an optimal level. This scenario emphasizes the urgency of promoting educational strategies that contribute to strengthening emotional self-regulation, which is key to the overall well-being and academic performance of students.

Based on the data analyzed in this study, it can be concluded that the student population is predominantly young, with most students under 21 years old and only a small percentage over 25 years old. There is an equitable distribution of gender, with a slight male majority. The majority of students are from the Nursing program, followed

by Industrial Engineering and Civil Engineering. In terms of emotional skills, most students present areas needing improvement, particularly in emotional development and the perception and understanding of emotions. The importance of strengthening these skills in the academic realm is evident. In the expression and labeling of emotions, as well as in their management and regulation, there is a clear need to bolster strategies that help students express, recognize, and manage their emotions more effectively, which can contribute to their well-being and academic performance.

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