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Social skills and academic performance in secondary school students in Peru

Habilidades sociales y rendimiento académico en estudiantes de secundaria en Perú

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Abstract

The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between social skills and academic performance in secondary school students at a public educational institution located in an Andean region of Peru. The research had a quantitative approach, was basic in nature, and employed a cross-sectional and descriptive-correlational design. The sample consisted of 113 students, who were given a survey and a social skills questionnaire. Among the main results, it was found that the students predominantly had average social skills, with a score of 84.07%. In terms of academic performance, the majority obtained a high grade (91.15%). Regarding the relationship between the variables, a Spearman's Rho coefficient of 0.17 was found, with a significance value of 0.07. It was concluded that there is no significant relationship between academic performance and all dimensions of social skills; however, a significant relationship was found between academic performance and the dimensions of communication and decision-making.

Keywords: social skills, academic performance, students.

Resumen

El objetivo principal del estudio fue determinar la relación entre las habilidades sociales y el rendimiento académico en estudiantes de secundaria de una institución educativa pública ubicada en una zona andina del Perú. La investigación tuvo un enfoque cuantitativo, fue de tipo básico y empleó un diseño transversal y descriptivo-correlacional. La muestra estuvo conformada por 113 estudiantes, a quienes se aplicó una encuesta y un cuestionario de habilidades sociales. Entre los principales resultados, se identificó que en los estudiantes predominaron las habilidades sociales en un nivel medio, con un 84.07 %. En cuanto al rendimiento académico, la mayoría obtuvo una calificación superior (91.15 %). Respecto a la relación entre las variables, se halló un coeficiente Rho de Spearman de 0.17, con un valor de significancia de 0.07. Se concluye que no existe una

relación significativa entre el rendimiento académico y la totalidad de las dimensiones de las habilidades sociales; sin embargo, sí se evidenció relación significativa entre el rendimiento académico y las dimensiones de comunicación y toma de decisiones.

Palabras clave habilidades sociales, rendimiento académico, estudiantes.

Introduction

Academic performance in secondary education has increasingly garnered attention among educators, psychologists, and educational policymakers. Numerous studies have demonstrated that not only cognitive characteristics, such as intelligence, impact academic outcomes but that social skills also play a fundamental role in students' academic development (Huttunen et al., 2024). Social skills, which encompass effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution, among others, have been shown to contribute significantly to students' healthy development and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011).

In the current educational context, adolescents face a variety of social and emotional challenges that can adversely affect their academic performance (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). A lack of social skills may lead to adaptation issues, often reflected in lower academic achievement (Wentzel, 2010). Thus, academic performance among secondary school students has become a crucial subject for analysis, serving as a strong predictor of future success. However, the complexity of learning and academic performance cannot be solely attributed to cognitive and academic factors; it must also account for the impact of social skills in students' lives.

Social skills encompass various dimensions, including assertiveness, communication, self-esteem, and decision-making, among others (Ministerio de Salud, 2006). These skills are essential for effective interaction with peers and teachers, contributing not only to the establishment of a positive and motivating school environment but also to the holistic development of adolescents (Durlak et al., 2011). Despite their significance, there is a notable scarcity of studies systematically analyzing the relationship between social skills and academic performance among secondary school students, particularly during this critical period for socio-emotional and academic development.

During adolescence, the cultivation of social skills is paramount, characterized by intense peer interactions and personal identity formation. In this developmental phase, such skills facilitate group integration and adaptation to various environments, directly influencing emotional well-being and academic success (Trelles & Zapata, 2024). Adolescents with proficient social competencies tend to exhibit fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance due to their enhanced ability to manage conflicts and the inherent stress of the educational context (Ángeles & Candia, 2023). Conversely, those lacking social skills often experience difficulties in integration, challenges in collaborative work, reduced classroom participation, and limited opportunities for emotional and academic support. This scenario can adversely affect both their assessment performance and motivation for learning (Escales & Pujantell, 2014).

Academic performance is a complex phenomenon influenced by various individual, familial, and school-related factors. Individual factors include personal characteristics such as motivation, self-efficacy, and cognitive abilities. Family dynamics, including parental support, home environment, and socioeconomic status, also significantly impact academic performance. Furthermore, elements such as student demographics, quality of instruction, school infrastructure, and climate are critical determinants of academic success (Artunduaga, 2024; Rodríguez, 2024).

Previous research has established that insufficient social skills negatively affect academic performance and school adaptation. Wentzel (2010) found that students with well-developed social skills tend to forge better relationships with teachers and peers, which in turn positively influences their motivation and performance. In contrast, students exhibiting poor social skills often display lower academic achievement, which is detrimental to their personal and educational development (Parker et al., 2004).

Despite these findings, existing literature does not extensively analyze the relationship between social skills and academic performance among secondary school students in Andean regions, characterized by peri-urban or rural contexts. Consequently, there is a pressing need to investigate this relationship, identifying both areas for improvement and potential intervention strategies that could be implemented within the educational system. Thus, the objective of the present study was to determine the relationship between four dimensions of social skills and academic performance among secondary school students at a public educational institution located in an Andean region of Peru.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach, utilizing various statistical methods to verify the proposed hypotheses. Additionally, it was classified as basic research, aimed at generating new knowledge for the development of future foundational theories, without seeking immediate applications (Smith, 2019). The design was non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive-correlational, as it aimed to establish relationships between four dimensions of social skills and the academic performance of secondary school students at the Nuestra Señora de la Asunción Educational Institution in Áncash, Peru.

Participants

The sample comprised 113 students. A non-probability purposive sampling method was employed, wherein the researcher intentionally selected participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives (Patton, 2015). The eligibility criteria were as follows:

a) Inclusion criteria: Students of both genders, aged between 10 and 18 years, enrolled from the first to the fifth year of secondary education at the institution, who provided informed assent and whose parents signed the informed consent.

b) Exclusion criteria: Students who did not agree to participate through informed assent, whose parents did not provide informed consent, or who were absent from the institution during the data collection period.

Instruments

The survey technique was employed, utilizing the following instruments:

1. **Sociodemographic form:** This included data on age, gender, and grade level**.**
2. **Social skills questionnaire** (Ministerio de Salud, 2006): Composed of 42 items using a Likert format with five response alternatives: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always. The questionnaire assesses four areas:

- **Assertiveness:** Items 1 to 12.
- **Communication:** Items 13 to 21.
- **Self-esteem:** Items 22 to 33.
- **Decision-making:** Items 34 to 42.

The scoring key varied from 1 to 5 depending on the item type. Direct evaluation (1 to 5) was applied to the following items: 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 38, 39, 41, and 42. The remaining items were scored inversely (5 to 1).

The instrument's validity was established through exploratory factor analysis, yielding satisfactory results (KMO = 0.71; p = 0.00; total variance explained = 36.82%), confirming construct validity. Reliability, assessed via internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha, was also satisfactory (α = 0.78) (Medrano & Muñoz-Navarro, 2017).

Statistical analysis

The inferential analysis included the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. Consequently, non-parametric statistics were employed. To analyze the relationship between the variables, the Spearman's Rho coefficient was utilized, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied for the comparison of means.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human beings proposed by the Asociación Médica Mundial (2024). Additionally, it posed no risks to the participants, and the results are potentially beneficial to the studied population.

Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic. At a 95% confidence level, significant values were found for academic performance and the self-esteem dimension of social skills. In contrast, the assertiveness, communication, and decision-making dimensions yielded non-significant values. It can be inferred that the data distribution does not approximate a normal distribution; therefore, non-parametric statistics were employed.

Table 1
Sample distribution analysis

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	**df**	**Sig.**
Academic Performance	0.1	113	0.00
Social Skills	0.06	113	0.20
Assertiveness	0.08	113	0.07
Communication	0.08	113	0.09
Self-Esteem	0.11	113	0.00
Decision Making	0.08	113	0.09

Table 2 illustrates the correlation between social skills and academic performance. At a 95% confidence level, it was determined that there is no significant relationship between the two variables ($p = 0.07$; $p > 0.05$). Regarding the dimensions, significant relationships were observed between academic performance and the communication dimension ($p = 0.21$; $p < 0.05$) as well as the decision-making dimension ($p = 0.22$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 2
Correlation between academic performance and social skills

		Academic Performance
Social Skills	Rho	0.17
	p	0.07
Assertiveness	Rho	0.07
	p	0.46
Communication	Rho	**0.21**
	p	0.03
Self-Esteem	Rho	0.10
	p	0.28
Decision-Making	Rho	**0.22**
	p	0.02

Table 3 presents a comparison of social skills and academic performance results by grade level. Findings derived from the Kruskal-Wallis test indicate significant differences in academic performance and across several dimensions of social skills based on grade. For academic performance, significant differences were identified ($p = 0.03$; $p < 0.05$), with students in the third and fifth grades displaying higher average ranks and lower academic performance compared to those in the second grade.

With respect to social skills, significant differences were found ($p = 0.00$; $p < 0.05$) across grade levels: fifth-grade students exhibited higher development of social skills, whereas fourth-grade students displayed the least development. Specific dimensions revealed differences in communication, self-esteem, and decision-making. Third and fifth graders demonstrated higher levels of development, while second and fourth graders exhibited lower values. No significant differences were found in the assertiveness dimension.

Table 3

Differences in social skills and academic performance by grade level

	Grade	N	Average Rank	H of Kruskal-Wallis	p
Academic performance	First	23	50.37	10.80	0.03
	Second	30	45.20		
	Third	22	68.25		
	Fourth	19	56.84		
	Fifth	19	70.79		
Social skills	First	23	47.91	34.25	0.00
	Second	30	59.67		
	Third	22	72.20		
	Fourth	19	24.24		
	Fifth	19	78.95		
Assertiveness	First	23	52.78	2.67	0.61
	Second	30	50.98		
	Third	22	62.11		
	Fourth	19	60.03		
	Fifth	19	62.66		
Communication	First	23	49.15	10.21	0.04
	Second	30	57.12		
	Third	22	63.20		
	Fourth	19	43.03		
	Fifth	19	73.11		
Self-esteem	First	23	53.22	38.98	0.00
	Second	30	65.73		
	Third	22	70.52		
	Fourth	19	16.82		
	Fifth	19	72.32		
Decision-making	First	23	44.61	36.06	0.00
	Second	30	52.02		
	Third	22	78.57		
	Fourth	19	30.82		
	Fifth	19	81.08		

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that there is no significant relationship between the four dimensions of social skills and academic performance. A relationship was only observed with the dimensions of communication and decision-making. This result aligns with recent research suggesting that these competencies may not exert an immediate influence on academic performance, or that their effects are indirect, mediated by other variables. In this context, Nieto et al. (2024) concluded that emotional intelligence does not have a direct correlation with academic performance; instead, its influence is mediated through emotional well-being, motivation, and learning strategies, which act as necessary mediating variables.

Similarly, Hachem et al. (2022) found that social competence enhances cognitive skills such as attention, memory, and complex thinking, which are crucial for academic performance. Thus, this study reinforces the idea that social skills alone do not serve as direct predictors of academic success, suggesting the need to consider cognitive, motivational, and external factors as necessary mediators for understanding this dynamic.

Moreover, López (2023) noted an absence of correlation between social skills and academic performance, indicating that social development and academic success follow distinct dynamics. According to this author, academic performance primarily depends on cognitive factors and learning management rather than social

interaction, a finding that resonates with the results presented. In this light, the findings confirm that while social skills are important for the holistic development of students, they do not necessarily predict academic performance.

In contrast to these results, various studies report a significant relationship between social skills and academic performance. Ávila (2023) discovered that students with higher social competencies tend to exhibit better academic outcomes. Pineda et al. (2024) showed that low academic performance is associated with limited social skills. Góngora and De Lille (2023) concluded that there is a significant relationship between socio-emotional skills and academic performance, highlighting their role in school adaptation and educational achievements. Similarly, Torres et al. (2020) confirmed that high levels of social skills promote academic success by facilitating adaptation and learning.

Other studies also support this positive association. Valencia and Valencia (2022) demonstrated that students with high levels of social skills perform better academically, while those with lower levels face a greater risk of academic failure. López (2020) argues that social skills positively influence academic performance, emphasizing that academic success does not depend solely on cognitive factors. Likewise, Justo and Bobadilla (2021) and Morales (2024) confirmed this relationship, reinforcing the perspective that enhancing social skills can serve as a predictor of academic performance. Additionally, Condori and Choque (2024) identified significant links between social skills and achievements in Social Sciences. Mestas and Lupaca (2019) also found a relationship between these variables, underscoring the determinative role of socio-emotional competencies in holistic education.

Moreover, there are investigations that, while not directly focusing on academic performance, reinforce the importance of social skills in other academic areas. Galindo (2022) reported their linkage to cooperative learning; Llallire (2021) found relationships with quality of life; and Guerrero (2024) identified that both resilience and social skills significantly influence academic performance. Rodríguez (2023) discovered an association between self-esteem and academic performance. These studies broaden our understanding of the impact of social skills across various dimensions of student life.

On another note, research emphasizing the interplay between social skills and behavioral or emotional variables has been identified. Estrada (2019) demonstrated their link to aggression; Vega (2020) found that a social skills program reduced anger in students; and Ruidias and Vásquez (2019) observed elevated aggression levels alongside social skills in certain groups, highlighting the complexity of these interactions based on gender and grade level.

In addition, other studies emphasize the interaction between social skills and factors such as academic procrastination. Unocc and Castillo (2020) reported that social skills relate to procrastination, while Ramírez (2019) confirmed the association between procrastination and academic performance. Maguiña (2019) found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and academic performance, and Villanueva (2019) identified an association with cooperative learning. This evidence suggests that social skills interact with psychosocial factors that also impact academic performance.

Furthermore, studies emphasizing the weight of external factors on academic performance, beyond social skills, have emerged. Maza and Roca (2024) highlighted the negative influence of family discord and lack of parental attention. Moreno and Cortez (2021) emphasized the importance of socioeconomic status and parental education. Tufiño and Cayambe (2023) underscored the role of the educational, familial, and social context in developing social skills. Artunduaga (2024) included personal, psychological, structural, and managerial factors as determinants of academic performance. This evidence illustrates that social skills interact with a broad array of external and contextual variables.

Concerning the findings of the present study, it is confirmed that communicative ability is positively related to academic performance, which aligns with the report by Romero et al. (2025). They demonstrated that competencies such as reading comprehension and academic writing facilitate university performance by promoting autonomy and expressive skills. Medina (2022) also noted that effective educational communication correlates with better academic results in university-level students.

Additionally, decision-making was favorably associated with academic performance. Cosio et al. (2021) found a positive correlation among medical students between decision-making, problem-solving, and academic performance, indicating that those with greater competencies in these areas establish clear goals and effectively manage conflicts, translating into superior performance. These skills also promote autonomy and learning planning.

The results also reveal differences in the relationship between academic performance and social skills based on grade level. Fifth-year students achieved the highest scores in both variables, whereas second and fourth graders recorded lower levels. This finding aligns with studies indicating that as students progress through secondary education, they acquire more cognitive resources and learning strategies that positively impact their

performance (Castejón & Navas, 2019). Furthermore, social skills tend to solidify during late adolescence, while intermediate stages may reveal setbacks linked to emotional pressures typical of development (Durán et al., 2021).

Regarding communication, fifth-year students exhibited the highest levels, highlighting the importance of developing communicative competencies in the later years of secondary education. In contrast, fourth-year students recorded the lowest values, possibly due to the transitional phase characterized by insecurity and identity conflicts, as Erikson (1968) suggests. This phenomenon may also correlate with temporary declines in self-esteem (Garaigordobil & Aliri, 2020).

Additionally, decision-making showed significant differences, with better performance among fifth graders, consistent with the development of autonomy and critical thinking in late adolescence (Steinberg, 2014). Conversely, fourth-grade students demonstrated lower capacity in this dimension, suggesting the need for implementing educational guidance and tutoring programs specifically targeting this group.

The relevance of this study lies within the research framework focused on educational quality and holistic student development, contributing evidence regarding the influence of social skills on formative processes within a specific school context. It is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies with larger samples in both public and private institutions across the region. Practically, there is a notable need to design and implement intervention programs aimed at enhancing social skills to boost both socio-emotional development and academic performance (Sate et al., 2025).

This study provides empirical evidence regarding the differentiated relationship between dimensions of social skills and academic performance. The findings are significant, as some align with previous literature while others contradict it. From a theoretical perspective, the results open new avenues for discussion regarding the mediating role of socio-emotional and contextual factors in learning, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive approaches in future research.

Lastly, a limitation of this study is acknowledged in the small sample size and the specific nature of the educational context, which restricts the generalization of the results. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the variables, confining the analysis to statistical associations.

Conclusions

The findings demonstrate that there is no statistically significant association between the four evaluated social skills and academic performance; thus, it is confirmed that, collectively, these competencies do not serve as a direct predictive factor for academic achievement. However, the dimensions of communication and decision-making maintain a positive relationship with academic achievement, indicating that these dimensions influence the learning process and academic performance of secondary students. Differences were also identified in the academic performance and social skills results according to grade level, with fifth graders obtaining the highest scores compared to other grades.

Moreover, it is concluded that social skills, as a whole, do not have a determinative influence on academic outcomes; however, some of their dimensions play a critical role in student formation. These findings provide empirical evidence for both theoretical spheres and for the design of pedagogical strategies and educational policies aimed at the integral strengthening of students.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.