

Effectiveness of a Psychoeducational Program for the Development of Social Skills in Children

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Abstract

Social skills play a fundamental role in the integral development of children, influencing their emotional well-being and future interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of a psychoeducational program in the development of social skills in primary education students. The research approach was quantitative, the design was experimental and the type was pre-experimental. The sample was made of 35 students of the fifth grade of primary education from a state educational institution in the city of Puerto Maldonado (Peru). A psychoeducational program of social skills was applied during 15 sessions and to evaluate its effectiveness, a questionnaire was administered before and after the intervention, which had adequate psychometric properties. The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the general scores of the average before (138.69) and then (158.94) of the application of the psychoeducational program. Regarding the scores of the dimensions, statistically significant differences were also reported between the scores of the average before and after ($p < 0.05$). It was concluded that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of the social skills of primary education students.

Keywords: *Social Skills, Childhood, Students, Primary Education, Psychoeducational Program.*

Introduction

The human being has the need to live in society, for which it is necessary to relate satisfactorily to others with the purpose of developing and living fully. This implies learning to communicate, solve problems, express their interests and points of view, tolerate, etc. In that sense, you must develop your social skills to live in harmony (Holst et al., 2017). In the case of students, when entering the school stage, they increase their social circle, which allows them to relate to their classmates, teachers and other members of the educational community. Therefore, it is important that they develop their social skills so that the previously described interactions are effective (Betancourth, et al., 2017).

According to Gismero (2000), social skills include a set of responses, both verbal and nonverbal, through which a person manifests their needs, interests, feelings, opinions or rights without experiencing excessive anxiety, acting assertively and respecting, at the same time, the needs and rights of others. Similarly, Caballo (2007) defines them as a set of behaviors that express feelings, opinions, rights and attitudes properly, respecting the behaviors of others, which facilitates the immediate resolution of problems and reduces the probabilities that they emerge again in the future. In addition, Del Prette & Del Prette (2008) provide a clear definition by pointing out that social skills are social behaviors available in the repertoire of people, which promote their social competence and optimize the interaction they establish with others.

These definitions together highlight the importance of social skills as a fundamental tool for effective communication, conflict resolution and the establishment of healthy and satisfactory relationships with others (Flores et al., 2016). The development of these skills not only positively influences the emotional well-being and social adjustment of people, but also contributes to improving the quality of life and favoring a more harmonious and comprehensive social environment. The importance of social skills development is, in addition, in which it constitutes one of the fundamental conditions to be socially competent and face the challenges and difficulties that arise in the constant interaction with others (Schneider et al., 2016). In

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this sense, the cultivation of these skills has the potential to reduce the probability of the appearance of school conflicts, violence, aggressiveness in pairs, isolation and apathy (Betancourt et al., 2017).

It is important to highlight those social skills cannot be acquired spontaneously or informally, but require planned educational actions and direct, deliberate and systematic intervention (López & Guaimaro, 2014). To develop these skills in students, it is essential to focus on two fundamental pillars: family and school, since social skills learning occurs through the observation of models, direct experience and reinforcements that are obtained (Betina & Contini, 2011).

In the family field, parents and caregivers play a crucial role as models to follow for children. Family interactions provide a platform for students to develop communication, empathy and conflict resolution (Liu et al., 2022). In addition, an affectionate and support family environment contributes to the strengthening of self-esteem and social trust. On the other hand, school is an environment conducive to promoting the development of social skills. Teachers can design and implement psychoeducational programs that explicitly teach these skills, promoting teamwork, collaboration and respect among classmates. In addition, the school environment can provide opportunities to practice and apply these skills in real contexts, which contributes to its consolidation and improvement.

In response to the need to promote the development of social skills in students from childhood to adolescence, various psychoeducational programs have been implemented in recent years. These programs have proven to be highly effective, especially when applied at an early age (January et al., 2011). The aforementioned programs consisted of a set of structured psycho-educative activities and strategies based on everyday life situations. This allowed those responsible for the interventions to expand and strengthen the repertoire of social skills in students, while weakening behaviors that could negatively affect interpersonal relationships and the school environment (Durlak et al., 2010; Del Prette & Del Prette, 2013).

By using experiential and contextualized approaches, these programs achieved a greater involvement of students, which resulted in a significant improvement in their social skills and the constructive resolution of conflicts. Early implementation of these interventions proved to be particularly beneficial, as it allowed students to develop strong social skills from a young age, which in turn had a positive influence on their personal growth and their adaptation to different social contexts (Estrada & Gallegos, 2021).

In Peru, some psychoeducational programs aimed at primary education students designed specifically to improve students' social skills have been implemented. Estrada et al. (2020a) carried out a Psycho-educative Intervention Program based on Goldstein's theoretical proposal and concluded that the aforementioned program contributed to the development of the social skills of the students of the sixth grade of elementary school. Similarly, also in Peru Estrada et al. (2020b) conducted the "Living Happily Together" psychoeducational program and after their application they concluded that students in the fourth grade of elementary school managed to significantly develop their social skills.

This research acquires significant relevance in the educational and psychological context, since social skills play a fundamental role in the integral development of children and in their adaptation to various social contexts. At the level of primary education, children are in a critical period of training their identity and social learning. The development of adequate social skills during this stage is essential for academic success and for the establishment of healthy relationships with their classmates, teachers and other members of the school community. In addition, well developed social skills contribute to the prevention of bullying, the constructive resolution of conflicts and the promotion of a positive and enriching school environment.

Despite the importance of social skills in the development of children, many students can face difficulties in this regard. Factors such as lack of opportunities to practice these skills, the influence of negative social models and emotional difficulties can hinder their proper development. In this sense, the implementation of a focused psychoeducational program in the development of social skills is presented as a valuable strategy to address these problems and strengthen the emotional and social well-being of students. The findings can guide the planning and implementation of future psychoeducational programs aimed at improving the emotional and social well-being of students in their earliest training stage.

Finally, the objective of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of a psychoeducational program in the development of social skills in primary education students

Method

The investigation adopted a quantitative approach, since data were collected for analysis and subsequent contrast of hypotheses through numerical measurements and the use of statistical techniques. The design was experimental, since a deliberate manipulation of the variable social skills was carried out through a psychoeducational program. In addition, a pre-experimental design was used, since it worked with a single group to which a pretest and a pos-test were applied (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018).

The sample was made up of 35 students of the fifth grade of primary education of a state educational institution of the Peruvian Amazon, this amount was determined by intentional non-probabilistic sampling. As inclusion criteria, students who had the informed consent of their parents were considered and that did not present physical or psychological limitations that restrict their participation in the research, while as exclusion criteria the students who did not participate in the majority were considered of applied learning sessions. Of all the participants, 54.3% were women and 45.7% were men. As for age, 57.1% were 11 years old, 34.3% were 10 years old and only 8.6% were 12 years old.

The data collection technique was the survey and the instrument was the Social Skills Questionnaire prepared by the Ministry of Health (2006). It consists of 42 Likert type items with 5 response alternatives that range between 1 (never) and 5 (always) and are distributed in 5 dimensions: social skills related to rights and obligations, social skills related to communication, social skills related to feelings, social skills alternative to aggression and social skills for stress management. In a previous study it was determined that the questionnaire had adequate psychometric properties (V of Aiken = 0.850, α = 0.832) (Estrada et al., 2020b).

The investigation consisted of three stages. In the first stage, the procedures were carried out to obtain the necessary permits, which implied coordination with the management team of the focused educational institution. Once the authorization was obtained, the pretest was carried out. The second stage focused on the implementation of the psychoeducational program. This program was comprehensive for 4 months (April, May, June and July) in which 15 learning sessions of 120 minutes each with an active methodology were executed. The topics addressed were: rights and obligations, communication, feelings, aggression and stress. Finally, in the third stage the post-test was applied in order to determine the effectiveness of the program.

The statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS Software version 22. For the descriptive analysis, percentage frequency tables were utilized. For hypothesis testing, the parametric Student's t-test was employed to compare the differences in means. Finally, values were considered less than or equal to 0.05 as significant.

In relation to ethical considerations, this investigation was carried out following the ethical principles established in Helsinki's statement and had the support of the Institutional Ethics Committee. It is relevant to point out, each of the parents was given an informed consent letter in which the purpose of the investigation was announced to obtain their voluntary consent. In this way, students were able to participate in the application of the program, as well as in data collection, both in the pretest and in the post-test.

Findings And Discussion

Findings

Figure 1 generally shows the means of the scores of the variable social skills and their respective dimensions. In that sense, it can be seen that in all cases there was an increase in the aforementioned scores after the application of the intervention program. In the case of the variable social skills, the percentage variation of the post-test with respect to the pre-test was 14.60%. In the case of dimensions, those that experienced a greater percentage variation were the social skills for stress management (28.64%) and social skills related to rights and obligations (16.46%). However, the dimensions that exhibited a lower percentage of variation were social skills related to communication (9.26%), social skills related to emotions (13.33%), and alternative social skills to aggression (14.23%).

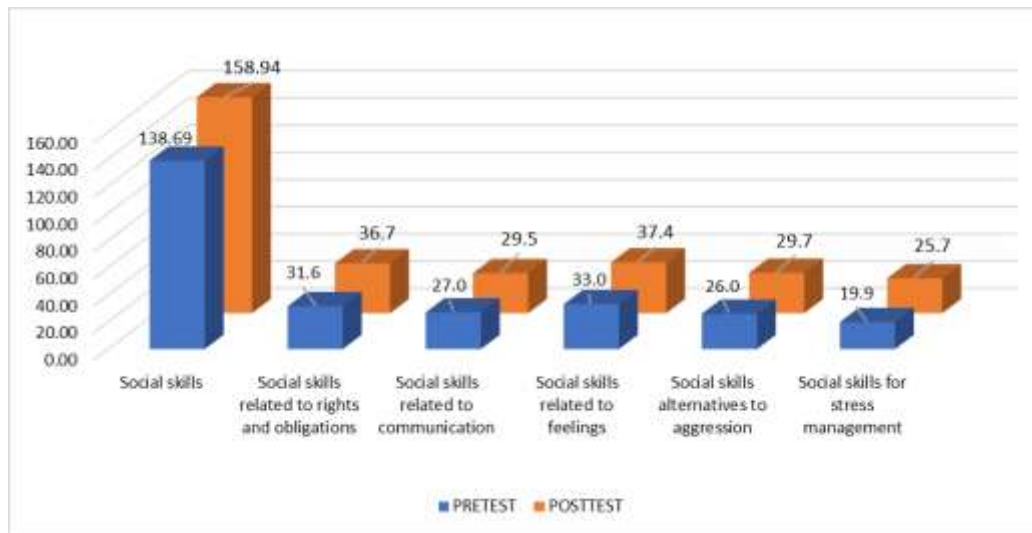


Figure 1. General comparison of the means of scores for the variable social skills and its dimensions.

Table 1 shows the comparison of the means of the general scores of the variable social skills. In the pretest, the average was 138.69, while in the post-test was 158.94, indicating an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. Likewise, it can be seen that the p-value of the Student's t-test for related samples was lower than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of the social skills of primary education students.

Table 1. Mean differences of social skills variable scores before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	138.69	15.043			
Post-test	35	158.94	13.088	-6.594	34	0.000

Table 2 shows the comparison of the means of the scores of the dimension social skills related to rights and obligations. During the pretest, the average was 31.57, while in the post-test it was 36.69, indicating an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. In addition, the p-value for the Student's t-test on related samples was observed to be less than the chosen significance level ($p < 0.05$), which means that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of social skills related to rights and obligations of primary education students.

Table 2. Mean differences in scores for the social skills related to rights and obligations dimension before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	31.57	6.175	-3.865	34	0.000

Post-test	35	36.69	4.418
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Table 3 shows the comparison of the means of the scores of the dimension social skills related to communication. During the pre-test, the average was 26.97, while in the post-test it was 29.46, which means that there was an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. Furthermore, it can be seen that the p-value of the Student's t-test was lower than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of the social skills related to communication of primary education students.

Table 3. Mean differences in scores for the social skills related to communication dimension before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	26.97	5.431			
Post-test	35	29.46	3.433	-2.311	34	0.027

Table 4 shows the comparison of the means of the scores of the dimension social skills related to feelings. During the pretest, the average was 33.00, while in the post-test it was 37.37, which means that there was an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. In addition, it can be seen that the p-value of the Student's t-test was lower than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of the social skills related to feelings of primary education students.

Table 4. Mean differences in scores for the social skills related to feelings dimension before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	33.00	5.931			
Post-test	35	37.37	5.298	-3.189	34	0.003

Table 5 can see the comparison of the means of the scores of the dimension social skills alternative to aggression. During the pretest, the average was 25.97, while in the post-test it was 29.74, which means that there was an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. In addition, it can be seen that the p-value of the Student's t-test was lower than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of the social skills alternatives to aggression in primary education students.

Table 5. Mean differences in scores for the social skills alternatives to aggression dimension before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	25.97	3.772			
Post-test	35	29.74	4.533	-3.765	34	0.001

Table 6 shows the comparison of the means of the scores of the dimension social skills for stress management. During the pre-test, the average was 19.91, while in the post-test it was 25.69, which means that there was an increase in scores after the application of the psychoeducational program. In addition, it can be seen that the p-value of the Student's t-test was lower than the level of significance ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the application of the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of social skills for stress management of primary education students.

Table 6. Mean differences in scores for the social skills for stress management dimension before and after the implementation of the psychoeducational program

Point	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	35	19.91	4.604			
Post-test	35	25.69	4.533	-6.459	34	0.000

Discussion

One of the most effective ways to develop social skills is through psychoeducational programs and strategies, especially when they start at an early age. These interventions allow students to prepare to live in a framework of respect, express their feelings properly, participate in team activities and assess the differences of others. Therefore, in this research it was sought to evaluate the effectiveness of a psychoeducational program in the development of social skills in primary education students.

When examining the results of the research, it was found that the average post-test scores of the students of the sixth grade of elementary school was significantly higher than the average pretest scores. The findings found indicate that before the application, the average of the total scores of the variable social skills was 138.69, which indicates that the students had deficiencies in the development of their social skills, which would be explained by the low sociocultural level of their parents, as well as the prioritization of the development of cognitive skills, leaving aside the training of their soft skills. However, after the application of the aforementioned psychoeducational strategies, the average increased, reaching 158.94, which indicates that there was an increase. However, then the hypothesis test was performed where it was evidenced that the difference of means between the pretest and the posttest was significant, since the p-value turned out to be lower to the level of significance previously raised ($p < 0.05$). This means that the psychoeducational program based on the recognition of rights and obligations, communication, knowledge of their own feelings, alternative strategies to aggression and stress management was significantly effective to improve students' social skills.

The exposed results strengthen the role played by the intervention and application of psychoeducational strategies aimed at training and developing social skills in schools of the level of primary education. Similar results were obtained by Estrada et al. (2020a), who carried out a psychoeducational intervention program based on Goldstein's theoretical proposal and concluded that the aforementioned program contributed to the development of the social skills of the students of the sixth grade of primary education. It also coincides with Estrada et al. (2020b), who executed the psychoeducational program "We lived happy" and after their application they concluded that students in the fourth grade of elementary school managed to significantly develop their social skills. On the other hand, it is related to Kaya & Kaval (2022), who implemented a psychoeducation program and concluded that said effective program to improve students' social skills.

According to Schneider et al. (2016), the acquisition of social skills is essential in the process of development of people, since it is one of the conditions to be socially competent and can successfully face the challenges, adversities and difficulties of constant interaction (Núñez et al., 2018). However, low levels of social skills development can influence the decrease in negative situations that arise in the classroom, such as peer socialization problems, lack of solidarity, violence and school aggressiveness, disruptive behavior, isolation, as well as insecurity (Betancourth et al., 2017).

From an educational perspective, the importance and need to promote the development of social skills are based on connoted authors, such as Delors (1996), who proposed as one of the four pillars of education "learn to live together", which implies that students must have skills that allow them to interrelate with others, respecting the divergence of thought and respecting their rights and life points within the framework of respect and tolerance. Similarly, Gardner (1983), proposed as one of the eight multiple interpersonal intelligences, which allows people to understand others by accepting personal differences, understanding their feelings, emotions, motivations and moods of encouragement, always putting interaction and empathy (Gonzales, et al., 2013).

The theories described support the relevance of cultivating social skills in the educational field, since they train students to be more in full and empathic citizens, capable of cooperating, resolving conflicts and respecting diversity. When implementing psychoeducational programs and strategies that promote the

development of social skills, educators can contribute significantly to the personal and social growth of students, preparing them for a harmonious and enriching coexistence in society.

The practical implications of our results are promising for educators, parents and professionals in the field of child development. The improvement in children's social skills could have a positive impact on their ability to interact with their classmates and adults, which in turn could foster a more harmonious and conducive classroom environment for learning. In addition, by learning to express their feelings properly, children can acquire better emotional understanding, which will allow them to manage their emotions more effectively in challenging situations.

Despite the positive results, the limitations of this investigation should be considered. First, the sample size was relatively small, which could affect the generalization of the results to a broader population. Secondly, the long-term monitoring of the effects of the intervention of the psychoeducational program was not carried out. It would be valuable to carry out longitudinal monitoring to assess whether the positive effects of social skills are maintained over time. In addition, although the intervention program showed significant improvements in social skills, we do not evaluate other possible factors that could have contributed to these results, such as family support or the school environment.

It is recommended that future investigations expand the approach to address some of the aforementioned limitations. A larger and diverse sample design would allow a more complete evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in different cultural and social contexts. In addition, it would be valuable to include a control group to compare the results with those children who did not receive the intervention. Finally, a longitudinal approach would also allow a more complete vision of long-term sustainability of improvements in children's social skills.

Conclusion

The development of social skills in students is a topic of great importance in the educational and psychological field. These skills play a fundamental role in the academic and personal life of students, since they influence their ability to establish healthy relationships, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts and face diverse social situations. The student stage is crucial for the formation of social competences, since in this period young people interact with their classmates, teachers and members of the educational community. The proper development of social skills not only impacts positively on school climate, but also reflected in the emotional well-being and academic performance of students.

In the present research it was determined that the psychoeducational program carried out is effective in the development of the social skills of primary education students. Similarly, it was found that the psychoeducational program was effective in the development of social skills related to rights and obligations, social skills related to communication, social skills related to feelings, social skills alternative to aggression and social skills for stress management. These findings are of great relevance for the educational field and the promotion of emotional well-being in children. It is recommended that future educational initiatives consider the implementation of similar programs to promote an enriching school environment that fosters personal growth and positive interactions.

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