



DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE HEALTH FIELD: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

DESENVOLVIMENTO DE HABILIDADES SOCIAIS ENTRE UNIVERSITÁRIOS DA ÁREA DA SAÚDE: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

DESARROLLO DE HABILIDADES SOCIALES EN UNIVERSITARIOS EN EL ÁMBITO DE LA SALUD: UNA REVISIÓN INTEGRATIVA



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ABSTRACT: The study aims to understand and summarize what the literature points out about the development of social skills among university students in the health field. The sample had as its method an Integrative review using the databases Embase, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cinahl, Eric, Pyschnet, Scielo, and gray literature in the Google Scholar, Open Gray, and Proquest databases. The sample consists of 22 articles that point to the Development of Social Skills of students in the health area in public and private universities, a topic that has been researched in Brazil, Turkey, Japan, Iran, Spain, USA, and Switzerland, with the purpose of understanding the different behaviors presented by students when they arrive at university. It was concluded considering that the theoretical-practical field of social skills is broad, the results allow us to identify that individuals with good interpersonal relationships are healthier, less prone to emotional illnesses and that social skills can be learned and improved, helping not only with academic development, but also with also in personal, family, social and professional development.

KEYWORDS: Social skills. Development. Health. Behaviors.

RESUMO: *O estudo tem como objetivo conhecer e sumarizar o que a literatura aponta sobre desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais entre estudantes universitários da área da saúde. A amostra teve como método uma revisão integrativa utilizando-se as bases Embase, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cinahl, Eric, Pyschnet, Scielo e a literatura cinzenta nas bases Google Acadêmico, Open Grey e Proquest. A amostra constitui-se de 22 artigos que apontam para o Desenvolvimento das Habilidades Sociais de estudantes da área da saúde em universidades públicas e privadas, tema que vem sendo pesquisado no Brasil, Turquia, Japão, Irã, Espanha, EUA, Suíça, com a finalidade de compreender os diversos comportamentos apresentados pelos estudantes quando chegam à universidade. Considerando que o campo teórico-prático das habilidades sociais é amplo, os resultados indicam que indivíduos com boas habilidades de relacionamento interpessoal tendem a ser mais saudáveis e menos propensos a doenças emocionais. Além disso, as habilidades sociais podem ser aprendidas e aprimoradas, contribuindo não apenas para o desenvolvimento acadêmico, mas também para o desenvolvimento pessoal, familiar, social e profissional.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Habilidades sociais. Desenvolvimento. Saúde. Comportamentos.

RESUMEN: *El estudio tiene como objetivo comprender y resumir lo que señala la literatura sobre el desarrollo de habilidades sociales entre estudiantes universitarios del campo de la salud. La muestra tuvo como método un revisión integrativa utilizando las bases de datos Embase, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cinahl, Eric, Pyschnet, Scielo y literatura gris en las bases de datos Google Scholar, Open Gray y Proquest. La muestra final está compuesta por 22 artículos que apuntan a la Desarrollo de Habilidades Sociales de estudiantes del área de la salud en universidades públicas y privadas, tema que ha sido investigado en Brasil, Turquía, Japón, Irán, España, Estados Unidos, Suiza, con el propósito de comprender los diferentes comportamientos que presentan los estudiantes cuando llegar a la universidad. Así considerando que el campo teórico-práctico de las habilidades sociales es amplio, los resultados permiten identificar que los individuos con buenas relaciones interpersonales son más sanos, menos propensos a enfermedades emocionales y que las habilidades sociales pueden aprenderse y mejorarse, ayudando no sólo con el desarrollo académico, pero también en el desarrollo personal, familiar, social y profesional.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Habilidades sociales. Desarrollo. Salud Comportamientos.

Introduction

The development of social skills (DSS) is a fundamental aspect throughout academic life, as it assists university students in integrating into higher education by improving the quality of social relationships and enabling the acquisition of new behaviors for interpersonal interactions (Pontes; Souza, 2011).

Social Skills, also known as 'soft skills,' are a set of competencies that allow us to interact effectively with others. They include emotional intelligence, communication, empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution, and are essential for success in various areas of life (Antunes, 2020). Similarly, they can be defined as a class or set of behaviors displayed in response to the demands of a situation in interpersonal relationships, which, when used appropriately, produce social gains while reducing losses in social interactions (Bolsoni-Silva; Carrara, 2010).

Sgobbi and Zanquim (2020) emphasize the importance of health professionals acquiring social skills and developing their competencies for good performance in their social and professional environments. It is essential that they communicate effectively, with self-awareness (self-monitoring) being a fundamental skill for the balanced handling of interpersonal relationships. Additionally, it is crucial that they develop the ability to learn and work in teams, as well as manage interactions and interpersonal relationships effectively.

The new and numerous challenges that are part of the routine for health students highlight the need to manage their own feelings and emotions, which often become stressors in interpersonal relationships due to the significant impact that a deficit in social skills can have on a person's health and quality of life (Ribeiro; Bolsoni-Silva, 2011; Murta, 2005).

During their training, health students deal with breaking taboos, such as cadaver dissection and access to the nudity of other human beings, among many other sensitive and significant moments. Moreover, they must develop healthy, empathetic relationships with patients in various healthcare settings in everyday situations, especially when patients are in serious conditions, which can significantly affect their emotions (Bolsoni-Silva *et al.*, 2010).

The development of social skills (Arón & Milicic, 1994) is one of the indicators most significantly related to mental health (MH) and, therefore, quality of life. Other authors, such as Beauchamp and Anderson (2010), discuss how emotional illness can lead to deficits in these skills and cause harm in these aspects.

Social skills develop gradually through childhood and adolescence and reflect a dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment. Emotional illness impairs the use of social skills, contributing to psychological

distress, social isolation, and reduced self-esteem, which can impact the quality of life (Beauchamp; Anderson, 2010, p. 39, our translation).

Other authors, such as Gouveia and Polydoro (2020) and Ramos *et al.* (2018), emphasize that the transformations higher education in Brazil has undergone over the past 20 years will lead to a new model of academic management aimed at meeting new educational demands, not only pedagogical but also human. The university is a space for holistic formation, encompassing personal, social, and professional aspects. This includes the development of social skills directly linked to better academic performance and successful professional integration.

In this context, the question arises: are higher education institutions in the health field fostering the development of social skills in their students? To address this question, the objective was to identify and summarize what the literature says about interventions for developing social skills among university students in the health field.

Method

This study was conducted as an integrative review, a method that promotes the synthesis and integration of relevant studies from the literature. The term 'integrative' (Whittemore; Knafl, 2005) derives from the integration of opinions, concepts, or ideas from research in the method, with an emphasis on the concept of evidence that stimulates and enhances the construction of science (Botelho; Cunha; Macedo, 2011). In the present study, the databases accessed included Embase, Pubmed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cinahl, PsycNET, Scielo, and the gray literature in Google Scholar, Open Grey, and Proquest databases, to search for additional articles, dissertations, and theses.

The inclusion criteria were: articles with qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches of any design, comprehensive interventions for social skills training, inclusion of at least two university students in the health field, and publications in English, Spanish, or Portuguese within the last 10 years.

The search was conducted between January 2010 and April 2020 using the keywords described in Table 1.

Chart 1 – Search Strategy in Different Databases

Pubmed	((<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency" AND ("training" OR "intervention") AND ("students"[MeSH Terms] OR "students" OR "student") OR "students"[MeSH Terms] OR "students") AND ("higher education" OR undergraduate OR under graduation OR academic OR ("universities"[MeSH Terms] OR "universities" OR "university")) AND "adult"[MeSH Terms]</i>)
Scopus	((<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency" AND ("training" OR "intervention") AND ("students" OR "student") AND ("higher education" OR undergraduate OR under graduation OR academic OR "universities" OR "university") AND NOT (child OR children OR adolescent OR adolescents)</i>)
Web of Science	((<i>"social skills" OR "social compet*") AND ((training OR intervention)) AND ((student* AND "higher education" OR undergraduat* OR academic OR universit*)) NOT (child*)</i> Refinado por: (education educational research or psychology educational or ethics or social sciences interdisciplinary or medical ethics or nursing or psychology developmental or health care sciences services or humanities multidisciplinary or psychology social or anthropology or social issues or multidisciplinary sciences or communication or medicine general internal)
Embase	(<i>'social skills' OR 'social competence' OR 'social competency' AND ('training' OR 'intervention') AND (students OR student) AND ('higher education' OR undergraduate OR under graduation OR academic OR universities NOT (child OR children)</i>)
CinaHL Ebsco	(<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency") AND ("training" OR "intervention") AND ("students" OR "student") AND ("higher education" OR "undergraduate" OR "undergraduation" OR "academic" OR "universities" OR "university")) NOT ((child OR children))</i>
ERIC	((<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency" AND ("training" OR "intervention") AND ((("students" OR "student") AND ("higher education" OR "undergraduate" OR "undergraduation" OR "academic" OR "universities" OR "university")) NOT ((child OR children)</i>)
Proquest Dissertations and Theses Global	((<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency" OR "habilidades sociais" OR "competência social" OR "habilidades sociales" OR "competencia social") AND ("training" OR "intervention" OR "treinamento" OR "capacitação" OR "intervenção" OR "entrenamiento" OR "intervención") AND ("students" OR "student" OR "estudiante" OR "estudiantes" OR "estudante" OR "estudantes") AND ("higher education" OR "undergraduate" OR "undergraduation" OR "academic" OR "universities" OR "university" OR "ensino superior" OR "graduação" OR "acadêmico" OR "acadêmica" OR "acadêmicos" OR "universitários" OR "universitário" OR "universidade" OR "graduación" OR "enseñanza superior" OR "educación superior" OR "universitários" OR "universidad")) NOT (("child" OR "children" OR "crianças" OR "criança" OR "niño" OR "niños")</i>)
Scielo	((<i>"social skills" OR "habilidades sociais" OR "habilidades sociales" AND ("training" OR "intervention" OR "treinamento" OR "capacitação" OR "intervenção" OR "entrenamiento" OR "intervención") AND ("higher education" OR "undergraduate" OR "ensino superior" OR "graduação" OR "universidade" OR "graduación" OR "enseñanza superior" OR "educación superior" OR "universidad") AND NOT ((children OR crianças OR niños)</i>)
Google Acadêmico	(<i>"social skills" OR "social competence" OR "social competency" OR "habilidades sociais" OR "competência social" OR "habilidades</i>

	<i>sociales" OR "competencia social") AND ("training" OR "intervention" OR "treinamento " OR "capacitação " OR "intervenção " OR "entrenamiento " OR "intervención") AND ("estudiante" OR "estudiantes" OR "estudante" OR "estudantes") AND ("higher education" OR "undergraduate" OR "undergraduation" OR "academic" OR "universities" OR "university" OR "ensino superior" OR "graduação" OR "acadêmico" OR "acadêmica" OR "acadêmicos" OR "universitários" OR "universitário" OR "universidade" OR "graduación" OR "enseñanza superior" OR "educación superior" OR "universitários" OR "universidad") Social skills</i>
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Source: Authors' compilation.

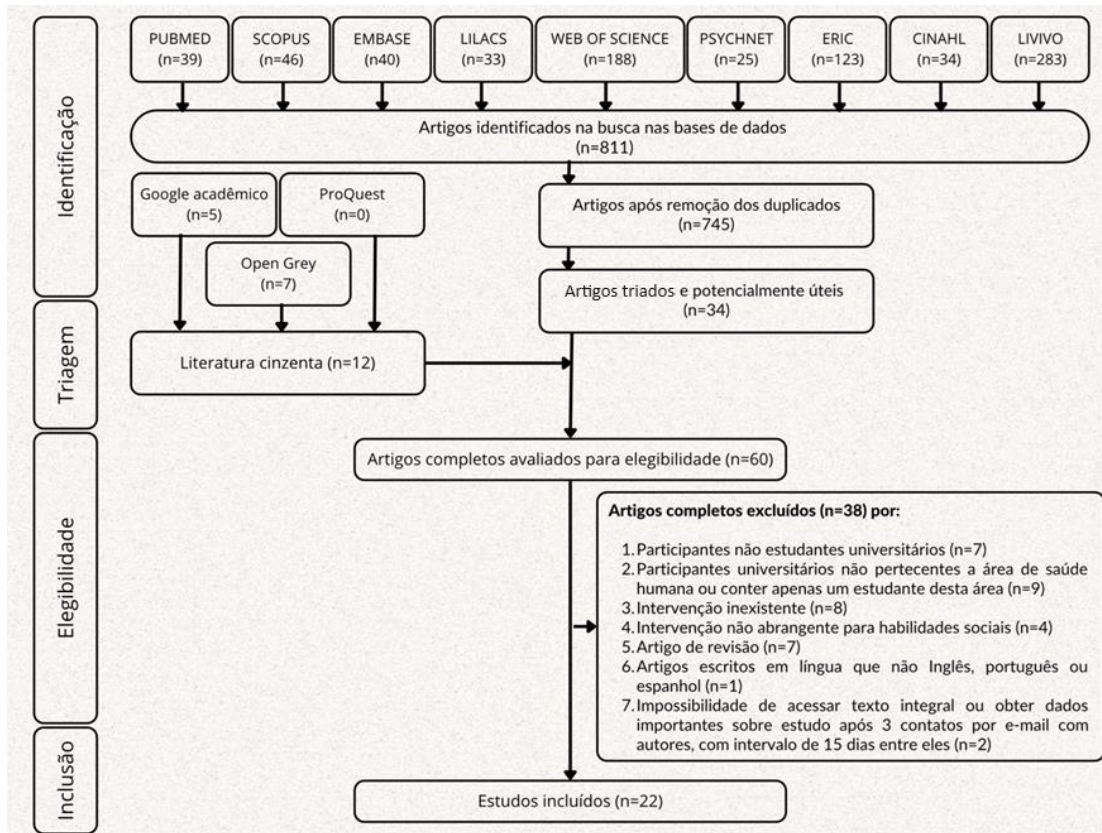
Given the need to understand social skills, the research question arose: what has been done recently to promote the development of social skills among university students in the health field? What interventions have been employed for this purpose? This question sought to understand how social skills are developed among university students not only in Brazil but also in countries such as Turkey, Iran, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States. Through an integrative review, the aim was to highlight the relevance of interventions focused on developing social skills among university students in the health field.

A shared Excel table was used as research material to collect data such as the database, article title, authors, year of publication, location, objectives, methods, participants, and findings. The data were qualitatively analyzed and synthesized temporally due to the impossibility of categorization.

Results

The database search resulted in 811 articles. After removing duplicates and analyzing the titles and abstracts by three independent reviewers, 60 articles were selected for full-text reading. Of these, 38 were excluded, and 22 were included for analysis, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Flowchart of the database search



Source: Compiled by the authors based on Liberati *et al.* (2009).

Of the 22 articles in the final sample, 23.4% are from the years 2010 to 2012, 27.23% were published between 2013 and 2015, an equal percentage between 2016 and 2018, and 27.23% between 2019 and 2020. These studies originated from the following countries: Brazil (15), Iran (2), Turkey (1), Japan (1), USA (1), Switzerland (1), and Spain (1).

To elaborate on the findings, the authors are presented according to a temporal breakdown.

Table 1 – Studies published from January 2010 to April 2020: objectives, design, and participants

Author, year and country	Objective	Study design	Participants
Mitrani (2010) – Turkey	To examine the effectiveness of an anger management training program	Pre-post controlled	Psychology students. GI: n=28 (5 from the 1st, 8 from the 2nd, 12 from the 3rd, and 3 from the 4th year); 26 women (93%); mean age= 22.0 years
Purehsan Saed (2010) – Iran	To investigate the effect of group cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) in reducing social anxiety among university students	Pre-post controlled	16 female students from courses in various areas of knowledge (not specified) 8 GI and 8 GC
Pontes Souza (2011) –Brazil	To investigate whether Social Skills Training (SST) with a group of university students is effective in reducing psychological distress	Descriptive	15 university students, including from the health area, 67% female
Pureza <i>et al.</i> (2012) – Brazil	To present and analyze a proposal for Social Skills Training (SST) in the university population that presented symptoms of anxiety disorder or social phobia	Pre-post uncontrolled	8 students from various courses at a private university joined the entire intervention among 22 from various courses at the university who started it
Shayan Ahmadi (2012) – Iran	To determine the effectiveness of Social Skills Training (SST) on the level of happiness of students	Pre-post uncontrolled	100 3rd year medical science students, selected by multi-stage random cluster, divided into 2 GI and 2 GC
Nishina Tanigak (2013) – Japan	To design and implement assertiveness training with nursing students and clarify its effects	Pre-post uncontrolled	Of 90 3rd year nursing students, 10 participated in the intervention (GI) and 56 participated in the GC; Mean age GI=21.1± 0.7 GC=21.2±0.9; participants. In the final session, a general review of the first 4 sessions was carried out
Rizvi e Steffel (2014) – USA	To examine the feasibility and initial effectiveness of 2 Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) training groups	Pre-post uncontrolled	24 university students from all courses, 21 women and 3 men, with a score lower than 105 on the Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS)
Wagner, Pereira Oliveira (2014) – Brazil	To evaluate the effectiveness of a Social Skills Training (SST) program in reducing social anxiety	Pre-post uncontrolled	32 students: 8 from psychology, 18 from law, 4 from accounting, architecture and administration, and 1 from social work and history each, with symptoms of social anxiety
Ferreira, Oliveira Vanderberghe (2014) – Brazil	To investigate the short- and long-term effects of a Social Skills Training group (THS)	Pre-post uncontrolled	34 students or former students from all areas of knowledge who had participated in the intervention; 26 women, 8 men; average age=24.2±8.2
Lima e Soares (2015) – Brazil	To describe a Social Skills Training (SST) to strengthen existing social skills and	Descriptive, qualitative	11 university students, including students in the health field, 7 female and 4 male; 8 from private universities and 3 from public universities

		eliminate competing behaviors in a preventive manner		Average age=21.27±1.9
Van Melis (2016) – Brazil		To describe the perception of university students about the Social Skills Training (SST) program offered by the Psychology III discipline in the Speech Therapy course	Descriptive qualitative approach	22 students in the speech therapy course, 20 female and 2 male, aged between 19 and 21
Moretto (2017) – Brazil		To describe the effects of a social skills intervention with university students conducted in a group, from the perspective of behavior analysis	1 Pre-post controlled and 1 Single-subject multiple baseline experimental	In the controlled pre-post, 14 students participated, 9 from the psychology course, 4 from design, and 1 from architecture in the 1st or 2nd year
Pozo-Rico, Gilar e Castejón (2017) – Spain		To describe a program to develop emotional intelligence in higher education	Pre-post controlled	192 university students from all areas: 4 groups randomly allocated (not specified how)
Souza, 2018 – Brazil		To evaluate a group behavior analysis intervention protocol, with a social skills training component, for university students with indicators of social anxiety	Pre-post and descriptive	12 students, 5 from courses in the Exact Sciences area (chemistry, civil engineering, and production engineering), 4 from physiotherapy, biotechnology, and medicine; 3 in humanities, psychology, and special education
Ramos <i>et al.</i> , (2018) – Brazil		To describe proposals for psychological interventions with university students developed from 2015 to 2017	Descriptive	4 to 6 weekly sessions, in individual and group format
Barbosa <i>et al.</i> (2018) – Brazil		To outline and present the results of an academic adaptation program in higher education	Action research and uncontrolled pre-post	22 university students: 7 in psychology, 3 in environmental engineering, 3 in production engineering, 2 in nursing, and 1 each in physiotherapy, food engineering, medicine, electrical engineering, physics, and nutrition
Lima, Soares e Souza (2019) – Brazil		To evaluate the effectiveness of Social Skills Training (SST) with university students in their initial period at the institution and the relationship between HS and academic experiences and social behaviors in academics	Uncontrolled pre-post	Mesma de Lima (2015)
Wagner <i>et al.</i> (2019) – Brazil		To describe the results of a group intervention of Social Skills Training (SST) with undergraduate students who presented a deficient repertoire of social skills (SS)	Pre-post	22 students from a private institution from different undergraduate courses, including in the area of human health, who presented interpersonal difficulties
Recabarren <i>et al.</i> (2019) – Switzerland		To evaluate the short-term effects of a multidimensional stress prevention program	Randomized controlled pre-post	Of 201 eligible students, 64 were included, 79.7% from the psychology course and others from various areas. Average age=21.3±2.5, 87.5% women; initial IG and CG (waiting list) n=32 each. Participants were distributed to the intervention or waiting list using

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The social skills developed in the selected studies were analyzed and comprehensively summarized according to the guidelines of an integrative review. The goal was to understand the development of social skills and the interventions applied and identify those most frequently addressed in the studies of the final sample.

The social skills that stood out included self-monitoring, self-awareness, and the ability to evaluate and adjust one's behavior. Additionally, assertiveness, passivity, aggression, empathy, verbal and non-verbal communication, mindfulness, as well as the concepts and application of these attitudes in interpersonal interactions were identified. It is important to note that each study addressed different social skills. Some focused on a specific skill, while others discussed multiple skills in a single study.

As highlighted by Rizvi and Steffel (2014), the interventions showed a reduction in anxiety and depression and an improvement in quality of life through the use of Social Skills and their interventions, utilizing Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Assertiveness Training, Mindfulness, and the Emotional Regulation Training adapted by Linehan (2014). The results demonstrated significant gains in all measures of emotional regulation, affect, and the use of social skills.

In a study conducted in Turkey in 2010 by Mitrani, some interventions used CBT approaches. The results indicated the effectiveness of CBT in anger management among participants who received group anger control interventions over six sessions. Other significant changes in anger scores were found after six months, consistent with the findings of the earlier study by Rizvi and Steffel (2014).

In a study conducted in Iran, Purehsan and Saed (2010) investigated the effects of group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) on reducing social anxiety among university students. The study included 16 female students from various unspecified fields of study, divided into 8 in the experimental group (EG) and 8 in the control group (CG), and also incorporated physical and muscle relaxation techniques in 8 one-hour sessions. The results showed that CBT was effective in increasing social skills and reducing social anxiety among the participants.

In a descriptive study conducted in Brazil, Pontes and Souza (2011) used 15 university students from various fields, including health, with 67% being female. The objective was to investigate the effectiveness of social skills training (SST) in reducing psychological distress in groups of university students. All participants reported improvements in social skills, even

those who did not show an increase in the Social Skills Inventory (SSI) score. It was concluded that SST proved to be a promising approach for improving interpersonal relationships, quality of life, and academic performance.

Pureza *et al.* (2012) presented and analyzed an SST proposal for a university population with symptoms of anxiety disorder or social phobia. The intervention was carried out with 8 students from various courses at a private university. The results indicated that patients who completed the SST intervention showed a significant reduction in symptoms of social anxiety and social phobia.

Shayan and Ahmadigatab (2012), in a study conducted in Iran, highlighted the effectiveness of social skills development, which included a series of cognitive and behavioral techniques, in increasing students' levels of happiness. The results showed that social skills development is effective in enhancing students' happiness. Nishina and Tanigaki (2013), in Japan, applied assertiveness concepts and practical methods of Assertiveness Training (Alberti; Emmons, 2008). The results underscored the need to promote studies that prepare students for assertiveness training practice and the development of assertive behavior in interpersonal relationships.

In an intervention program conducted in Brazil, Wagner, Pereira, and Oliveira (2014) aimed to assess the effectiveness of a Social Skills Training (SST) program in reducing social anxiety. The study demonstrated that a brief group intervention in interpersonal relationships as part of the social skills development program was effective in decreasing social anxiety among university students.

In Brazil, Ferreira, Oliveira, and Vandenberghe (2014) conducted a study with 34 university students and former students from various fields of study, including 26 women and 8 men. The results highlighted that most participants benefited from the social skills development program, noting an increase in social skills scores and a decrease in anxiety levels, with these effects being sustained over the long term.

Another study conducted by Lima and Soares (2015) in Brazil aimed at applying Social Skills Training (SST) to university students facing challenging situations in the academic context. The purpose was to develop social skills and facilitate better social performance for the students. The results indicated the need to implement SST programs for university students, not only in the academic context but also in other settings, as a preventive measure to promote better social interaction and a healthier psychological life.

In another Brazilian study conducted by Van Melis (2016), focusing on social skills among fourth-year Speech Therapy students, with 22 female and 2 male students aged between 19 and 21 years, it was noted that the inclusion of SST in the professional training of Speech Therapy students proved to be quite promising by expanding the repertoire of social skills and competencies beyond theoretical/technical knowledge, with self-awareness playing a central role in this process, resulting in behavioral changes in personal and professional life.

The study by Moretto (2017) in Brazil describes the effects of a social skills intervention with university students (both clinical and non-clinical) on indicators of anxiety, depression, social phobia, and substance abuse, conducted in a group setting from a Behavioral Analysis perspective. Overall, the results indicate that the interventions had effects on promoting social skills repertoire and reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression among university students.

Although both studies demonstrate the effectiveness of social skills interventions for university students, they differ significantly in their focus, methodology, and specific outcomes. The study by Van Melis (2016) is more directed toward the professional training and personal development of Speech Therapy students, while the study by Moretto (2017) addresses a broader range of university students and focuses on improving mental health through Behavioral Analysis. Both studies, however, emphasize the importance of social skills in the academic and personal development of students.

Pozo-Rico, Gilar, and Castejón (2017) in Spain described a program for developing Emotional Intelligence in higher education, using a pre-post controlled study design. The study involved 192 university students from various fields of study, randomly divided into four groups. The positive results indicated that the social skills program was effective in improving students' emotional intelligence, providing opportunities to enhance interpersonal relationships and manage anxiety.

In Brazil, Souza (2018) conducted a study aimed at evaluating an analytical-behavioral group intervention protocol, with a component of social skills training, targeting university students with indicators of social anxiety. The results highlighted the need to develop and maintain a social skills program to improve anxiety levels, promote greater interaction, and develop interpersonal relationships.

Ramos *et al.* (2018), also in Brazil, proposed a descriptive study on psychological interventions with university students, emphasizing the importance of maintaining ongoing and continuous actions to improve social skills. All interview participants reported that the workshop helped them face challenges in academic and social life, and highlighted the need for

more projects addressing issues related to academic life, career, interpersonal relationships, and student well-being. Barbosa *et al.* (2018) conducted a study aiming to outline and present the results of an academic adaptation program in higher education with 22 university students. The results showed effectiveness with a significant increase in indicators of overall life satisfaction and academic self-efficacy related to cognitive skills in building new knowledge.

In Brazil, Wagner *et al.* (2019) described the results of a group intervention involving Social Skills Training (SST) with undergraduate students who exhibited deficient social skills and symptoms of social anxiety. The results indicated a reduction in the average total score after the intervention, suggesting that participants showed improvements in their social skills repertoire and group interaction, as well as increased assertiveness.

Recabarren *et al.* (2019), in a randomized pre-post-controlled study conducted in Switzerland, evaluated the short-term effects of a multidimensional stress prevention program with 201 university students. The results indicated that the program could assist in improving emotional intelligence, providing better emotion regulation, and enhancing social interactions.

The various studies presented aimed to examine, investigate, analyze, determine, describe, and outline the results and effectiveness of academic adaptation programs in higher education over the short term. These studies highlighted the importance of a multidimensional program in reducing psychological distress and preventing conditions such as generalized anxiety, social phobia, depression, addiction, and emotional stress. In particular, the study by Moretto (2017) demonstrated the effectiveness of social skills training (SST), which was conducted from a behavioral analysis perspective and aligned with the findings of Purehsan and Saed (2010).

Similarly, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for anger control (Mitrani, 2010), which used questionnaires and the Social Skills Inventory (SSI), are comparable to the study by Pontes and Souza (2011), which demonstrated the effectiveness of SST in reducing psychological distress. Furthermore, Linehan's (2014) Emotional Regulation Training and the development of the Emotional Intelligence program (Pozo-Rico; Gilar; Castejón, 2017) aims to provide a detailed description of the application of these interventions in higher education.

The studies highlighted that approximately 85% of the articles reported the use of social skills development as responsible for reducing symptoms of anxiety, social phobia, and depression. About 15% of the articles emphasized the use of other methods, such as psychoeducation, physical and muscular relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, and

self-monitoring to decrease and control anxiety, depression, and Borderline Personality Disorder with training in Emotional Regulation (ER).

Discussion

The selected studies comprehensively analyzed and summarized the social skills developed globally, emphasizing their relevance in academic training to enable students to learn how to interact effectively with others and handle various social situations. The main goal was to understand the development of these skills and identify those most frequently addressed in the final sample studies.

The most frequently mentioned social skills were self-monitoring, assertiveness (including passivity and aggressiveness), empathy, verbal and non-verbal communication (including giving and receiving feedback), mindfulness training, and expression and listening skills. Each study presented different social skills, but overall, they demonstrated the acceptability and effectiveness of these skills in treating severe or very severe anxiety at the end of the intervention, as well as in improving quality of life.

The techniques used in the studies included Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), assertiveness training, mindfulness, and emotional regulation training. These methods provided substantial support for the effectiveness of social skills interventions, highlighting their importance in both academic contexts and the mental health and overall well-being of students. The studies also emphasized the effectiveness of group interventions in improving social skills and reducing social anxiety among university students. They reported improvements in social skills deficits, increased assertiveness, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression following participation in social skills development programs.

Overall, the results indicated that interventions focused on social skills development are promising for enhancing interpersonal skills, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and promoting a better quality of life among university students. These studies underscore the importance of therapeutic approaches aimed at strengthening social skills as an effective strategy for addressing emotional and social challenges during academic life.

Developing and enhancing social skills is essential for a successful social and professional life, as these competencies play a crucial role in building positive interpersonal relationships and adapting to different social environments. In summary, developing social

skills is vital for a socially, emotionally, and professionally satisfying life. These skills not only improve the quality of personal and professional relationships but also contribute significantly to overall well-being and success in life.

The integrative review stands out for its ability to identify gaps in knowledge, facilitating the understanding of the presented concepts and their complexities. This method analyzes and synthesizes the results of studies independently, consolidating detailed information and contributing to the advancement of knowledge and its implications. However, a limitation of the integrative review is the restriction of the discussed concepts, which may constrain the methodological analysis of studies and limit their detail. For future research, it is suggested that the sample be expanded to include the last five years, incorporating clinical practice as a source of data and metadata, which will enrich the research process.

Final considerations

Discussing the fundamentals of this study in detail aims to understand how universities can help mitigate the challenges faced by students in the early years of undergraduate education. This objective is crucial for preventing the rising rates of academic dropout and identifying psychological distress, including its possible causes and consequences.

The use of social skills through a Social Skills Development (SSD) program should be considered relevant for promoting quality teaching and learning. Implementing this program on university campuses could expand the repertoire of social skills for both students and professors.

It is essential to recognize that balanced emotional health contributes to the enhancement of the formal curriculum by facilitating the acquisition of social skills and improving interpersonal relationships. Additionally, it contributes to the comprehensive development of both students and professors, promoting a professional practice that is conscious, competent, and humane. Social skills can be learned and refined, aiding in academic development and personal, familial, social, and professional growth.

The importance of continuing this study and promoting further research on the subject is emphasized, with the aim of incorporating social skills as a mandatory subject in the official university curriculum. This will allow the content to be directed towards the holistic development of individuals.

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