

Comparative analysis of social skills in a rural and urban context in Colombia

Análisis comparativo de las habilidades sociales en un contexto rural y urbano de Colombia

Análise comparativa das competências sociais num contexto rural e urbano contexto rural e urbano na Colômbia

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Abstract

Introduction: This article compares the social skills of 6th grade students from two schools, one in a rural area and the other in an urban area in Santander (Colombia), to identify how context influences the development of social competencies. **Objective:** To compare social skills in rural and urban contexts in Santander. **Methodology:** A quantitative approach with a descriptive-comparative design was used. The instruments used were a sociodemographic questionnaire and the BAS-3 Socialization Battery, which evaluated five dimensions: social anxiety/timidity, leadership, sincerity, consideration for others, self-control in relationships and social withdrawal. The sample consisted of 93 participants from two educational institutions, one in Mesa de los Santos (rural) and the other in Bucaramanga (urban). **Results:** Significant differences were found in self-control, consideration for others and social withdrawal. Students in the rural school showed greater empathy, reading the needs of others and self-regulation. Urban students excelled in leadership and sincerity. **Conclusions:** Rural students possess greater socioemotional skills compared to urban students, highlighting the need to strengthen these competencies in the urban context. The research emphasizes the importance of designing contextualized educational programs for the development of social skills in adolescents, thus contributing to education in the country.

Keywords: Adolescents; Social Skills; Childhood; Rural; Urban.

Resumen

Introducción: Este artículo compara las habilidades sociales de estudiantes de 6° de dos colegios, uno en área rural y otro en área urbana de Santander (Colombia), para identificar cómo el contexto influye en el desarrollo de competencias sociales. **Objetivo:** Comparar las habilidades sociales en contextos rurales y urbanos en Santander. **Metodología:** Se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo con un diseño descriptivo-comparativo. Los instrumentos empleados fueron un cuestionario sociodemográfico y la Batería de Socialización BAS-3, que evaluó cinco dimensiones: ansiedad social/timidez, liderazgo, sinceridad, consideración con los demás, autocontrol en relaciones y retraimiento sociales. La muestra consistió en 93 participantes de dos instituciones educativas, una en la Mesa de los Santos (rural) y otra en Bucaramanga (urbana). **Resultados:** Se hallaron diferencias significativas en autocontrol, consideración con los demás y retraimiento social. Los estudiantes del colegio rural mostraron mayor empatía, lectura de las necesidades ajenas y autorregulación. Los estudiantes urbanos destacaron en liderazgo y sinceridad. **Conclusiones:** Los estudiantes rurales poseen mayores habilidades socioemocionales comparados con los urbanos, resaltando la necesidad de fortalecer estas competencias en el contexto urbano. La investigación enfatiza la importancia de diseñar programas educativos contextualizados para el desarrollo de habilidades sociales en adolescentes, contribuyendo así a la educación en el país.

Palabras clave: Adolescentes; Habilidades Sociales; Infancia; Rural; Urbano.

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Resumo

Introdução: Este artigo compara as habilidades sociais de alunos do 6º ano de duas escolas, uma em uma área rural e outra em uma área urbana em Santander (Colômbia), para identificar como o contexto influencia o desenvolvimento de competências sociais. **Objetivo:** Comparar as competências sociais em contextos rurais e urbanos em Santander. **Metodologia:** Foi utilizada uma abordagem quantitativa com um desenho descritivo-comparativo. Os instrumentos utilizados foram um questionário sócio-demográfico e a Bateria de Socialização BAS-3, que avalia cinco dimensões: ansiedade social/timidez, liderança, sinceridade, consideração pelos outros, auto-controlo nas relações e retraimento social. A amostra era constituída por 93 participantes de duas instituições de ensino, uma em Mesa de los Santos (rural) e outra em Bucaramanga (urbana). **Resultados:** Foram encontradas diferenças significativas no autocontrole, na consideração pelos outros e no retraimento social. Os alunos da escola rural mostraram maior empatia, leitura das necessidades dos outros e autorregulação. Os alunos da escola urbana destacaram-se na liderança e na sinceridade. **Conclusões:** Os alunos das escolas rurais possuem mais competências socio-emocionais do que os alunos das escolas urbanas, o que evidencia a necessidade de reforçar estas competências no contexto urbano. A pesquisa enfatiza a importância da elaboração de programas educacionais contextualizados para o desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais em adolescentes, contribuindo assim para a educação no país.

Palavras-chave: Adolescentes; Habilidades Sociais; Infância; Rural; Urbano.



INTRODUCTION

Social skills refer to a set of competencies that allow us to flow with the challenges experienced in the establishment of interpersonal relationships (Flórez and Prado, 2021; Alarcón and Llorente, 2021). These are learned in different socialization scenarios and are essential to become competent citizens (Betoré and Quílez, 2021).

The development of these help to get involved with the other, understand their affections, avoiding feelings of loneliness, present in today's adolescents (Bernal and Camacho, 2020).

Authors such as Gil and Linas (2020) state that social skills influence the quality of life of adolescents and their self-esteem. Empathy and assertive communication are considered skills that prevent risk situations and social maladjustment. Empathy is defined as the ability to connect with what the other feels in order to establish a genuine and authentic bond (Bellows et al., 2023).

Assertive communication is the ability to transmit ideas, perceptions and feelings without affecting the well-being of the other, becoming a necessity in today's adolescents (Tacca et al, 2020). The absence of this fosters passivity and aggressiveness in communication (Flórez and Prado, 2021).

It has been shown that this development depends on academic performance, self-esteem and conflict resolution skills, since a study by Mera et al. (2021) showed that adolescent girls with low school performance and who are victims of harassment/bullying have greater self-esteem problems and are more conflictive. This study also found that parents affect the development of social skills, since pathological control, authoritarian role and extreme autonomy restrict emotional expression.

A problematic that glimpses the need to work on promoting solidarity, the ability to detach oneself from one's own to listen and feel the other, establishing a dialogic and peaceful culture. Thus, the interest arises from a vision that aims to compare social skills with institutions, in two rural and urban contexts in the region of Santander (Colombia). With the intention of comparing the social skills of sixth grade students from two schools in the Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga, one located in rural areas (Mesa de los Santos) and the other in an urban area (Bucaramanga).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the year 2020, Colombia had an estimated population of 12,672,168 young people between 14 and 28 years of age, representing 25% of the total population; among them, 50.4% men and 49.6% women. Of which 76% are located in urban areas and the remaining percentage in rural areas (Administrative Department of Statistics, DANE, 2020).

In Colombia, it must be recognized that, both in rural and urban areas, many young people live in marginal contexts, are victims of the armed conflict and live in poverty (Flórez and Prado, 2021). They also present various psychosocial risk factors, such as: high rate of unschooling,



different types of violence, vulnerability in the educational environment and lack of access routes (Lotero Franco et al., 2020).

Along the same lines, research has been conducted on the development of social skills in diverse educational contexts (Dávila-Ramírez and Urquijo, 2021). A general study on schooled adolescents showed that social skills in Colombia, such as empathy, interpersonal relationships and assertive communication, are indispensable for students to possess effective tools before everyday social situations, possess empathy for the feelings of their peers in difficult moments, accept differences and offer support to those in need of care in rural contexts (Flórez and Prado, 2021).

While in the urban environment it has been found that priority is given to individual work and social-verbal skills, highlighting the interaction between teachers and students (Cruz et al., 2018). It was also analyzed that adolescents manifest feelings to a greater extent with peers, although in the end they feel less confidence to express and respond to the emotional manifestations of their peers (Salazar et al., 2020). According to the above results, in both rural and urban contexts there are difficulties in expressing emotions and establishing bonds of trust, which brings consequences such as: high dropout rates, different types of violence at the individual, social and cultural levels, deficit of technological access; the poor preparation of teachers, linked to low levels of academic performance. Factors that favor school dropout, mainly in secondary education, poverty and limited socio-cognitive development (Lotero Franco et al., 2020).

Therefore, the educational environment is recognized as an opportunity where social-emotional skills can be strengthened in students, in those who come from rural contexts, where they may face more pronounced social and economic challenges. For example, López (2019) highlights that poverty and rural underdevelopment in Colombia can affect access to educational opportunities and the development of social skills in children living in these areas. A situation that can trigger an increase in aggressive behaviors and social adaptation problems (Lotero Franco et al., 2020).

However, another variable of great impact is the relationship between economics and education in the development of social skills. One of the most relevant researches of this decade is that of Caballero et al. (2018) where in their study of students aged 12 to 17 years, from different socioeconomic levels, they found significant differences in relation to social skills and socioeconomic stratum (Mejail et al., 2021). In the study it was evidenced that the variables of self-control, leadership, withdrawal and social anxiety present higher scores in students of lower strata. This is due to the fact that adolescents from vulnerable environments focus their attention more on important and empathic factors such as building a good support network, providing service to those who need it and being a guide for their friends compared to high strata populations, where avoidant, competitive and individualistic behaviors are presented (Ostrander & Christiansen, 2020).

Indeed, when comparing the development of social skills in urban and rural contexts (Franco et al., 2021), they found that the development of these skills needs to be strengthened in the curricular designs of rural areas. However, Medellín and Arroyo (2022) investigated that in the rural area of Córdoba (Colombia), children reveal greater feelings of solidarity and emotional understanding.

There is a correlation between the management of emotions, tensions and stress, and emotional regulation and the



recognition of sources of stress (Salazar et al., 2020). In addition, effective and assertive communication is encouraged, with emphasis on humility and the use of specific strategies such as deep breathing and the cultivation of positive thoughts (Mera et al., 2021). These social skills are fundamental to promote healthy and satisfying relationships among children in both rural and urban settings. Salazar et al. (2020) conclude in their study that the good development of these skills, both in women and men, facilitates assertive conflict resolution, emotional expression and social acceptance.

3. METHODOLOGY

Approach and design:

The current study presents a quantitative approach, with a descriptive-comparative design; in this type of methodology it seeks to describe and characterize a phenomenon or a population in detail which implies that comparisons will be made between different groups and situations to identify similarities, differences or patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The study focuses on collecting quantitative data to describe and compare different aspects or groups of interest, particularly the urban sector with the rural sector (Neuman, 2020).

Participants:

The sample was selected by convenience in two public educational institutions in Santander (Colombia). One located in Mesa de los Santos (rural) and the other in the Metropolitan Area of Bucaramanga (urban). The sample consisted of 93 participants, and the average age obtained was 12 years, with a minimum of 11 years and a maximum of 14 years. It was also evident that the male population was predominant (51.61%).

Instruments:

To achieve the objectives, a sociodemographic questionnaire was used, which allowed the collection of useful data such as type of school, age, stratum, gender and family composition. This instrument was constructed within the macroproject of the social psychology and education (PSE) seedbed of the Psychology Faculty of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Bucaramanga section.

Socialization Battery (BAS-3) (Silva and Pallás, 2018) this was in charge of detecting several aspects of adolescents' social behavior. It evaluates five dimensions: consideration with others, self-control in social relationships, social withdrawal, (social anxiety/shyness), leadership and sincerity. This instrument has a high reliability, supported by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which reflects the internal consistency of the measurement scales in the dimensions (Co: Consideration with others - Internal consistency: 0.82; Ac: Self-control - Internal consistency: 0.78; Re: Social withdrawal - Internal consistency: 0.78; Re: Self-control - Internal consistency: 0.78; Re: Self-control in social relationships - Internal consistency: 0.78; Re: Self-control in social relationships - Internal consistency: 0.78).
- Internal consistency: 0.81; At: Social anxiety and shyness - Internal consistency: 0.78; Li: Leadership - Internal consistency: 0.73; S: Sincerity - Internal consistency: 0.60).

These internal consistency values validate the reliability and robustness of the scales used in the

instrument. Consideration for others (Co): it has 14 items, it fulfills the function of detecting social sensitivity or concern for others, particularly for those who have problems and are rejected. Self-control (AC): it is a bipolar dimension, consisting of 14 items, which represent its positive pole, compliance with rules and social norms, being these facilitators of coexistence in mutual respect and in the negative pole, behaviors of indiscipline, aggressiveness and stubbornness. Social withdrawal (Re): presents 14 elements, which are responsible for detecting the passive and active withdrawal of adolescents, up to extreme isolation. Social anxiety/shyness (At): consists of 12 items, which detect different manifestations of anxiety such as fear and nervousness related to reactions of shyness in social circles. Leadership (Li): has 12 items, which detect ascendancy, popularity, initiative and self-confidence. To the 5 socialization scales is added the dimension: Sincerity (S): it has 10 items corrected in the inverse sense of the leadership scale. The form of evaluation implemented in the project was based on a dichotomous scale of Yes or No, which allowed obtaining these results to meet the objectives set. This questionnaire met a Cronbach's Alpha of .510, being a model of internal consistency, which analyzes the reliability of the test.

Procedure

A thorough search was conducted for two institutions, one in a rural area and the other in an urban area, that met the necessary requirements to guarantee the quality of the data obtained. After establishing contact with these institutions, a detailed presentation of the project was made to parents and teachers to contextualize the research proposal, the instruments to be used and the potential benefits. After obtaining the approval of both institutions, we proceeded with the application of the instruments to sixth grade students. Two instruments were applied, the BAS-3, which is described in the previous section, and a sociodemographic questionnaire in which they were asked about family conformation and socioeconomic stratum, which refers to the classification of the socioeconomic level that the family has in relation to the location of the residence and monthly income (DANE 2020).

The next phase involved entering the data obtained in a database created in Excel and SPSS version 25. Then, a data analysis was carried out using SPSS, where the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Moscovich, 2023) was applied to evaluate the normality of the data and the Mann-Whitney test to determine significant differences between the dimensions evaluated in both institutions (Valverde and Socorro, 2023).

4. RESULTS

The average age of the participating adolescents was 12 years. In the urban institute, most of the students live with both parents and siblings (54.05%), while in the rural institution, families made up of single mothers predominate (26.79%). In relation to socioeconomic level, in the urban school the middle socioeconomic stratum predominated (44.64%), compared to the rural school, where the majority was located in the low socioeconomic stratum (62.16%).

Comparing social skills, in rural and urban areas, it was found that in rural areas,

adolescents show greater concern for others ($\mu=44.32$). It was also evidenced that students from the rural institution show greater self-control in social relationships ($\mu=62.38$); which could be related to the closer community environment and the more cohesive social support characteristic of these areas. Adolescents located in urban areas show a higher level of social withdrawal ($\mu=78.70$) compared to rural areas ($\mu=65.03$); as well as greater social anxiety ($\mu=68.20$) in contrast to their peers in rural areas (50.46); possibly due to the more competitive and stressful nature of the urban environment. In addition, urban adolescents show greater leadership ($\mu=47.29$) compared to rural areas ($\mu=42.92$), which could be a reflection of greater opportunities to develop leadership skills in more diversified and resourceful environments. These findings underscore the importance of considering contextual differences when designing psychological and social support programs for adolescents, adapting to the specific needs of each setting (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Comparison of social skills in rural and urban settings.

Dimensions	Rural				Urban			
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation Standard	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation Standard
Consideration for others	1	99	44,32	0	0	99	34,93	26,933
Self-control in social relations	3	99	62,38	3	3	99	42,25	28,188
Social withdrawal	0	99	65,03	0	0	99	78,70	24,917
Social anxiety	0	99	50,46	11	11	99	68,20	21,814
Leadership	0	98	42,92	1	1	97	47,29	29,259
Sincerity	5	99	35,70	0	0	99	42,32	31,755

To obtain a comparative analysis, it was determined to perform a normality test called Kolmogorov-Smirnova, a test that allowed obtaining significant data as can be seen in Table 2, where it is shown that the significance has a value of $p \leq .005$, thus determining that the data do not correspond to a pattern of normality.

Table 2.

Normality tests on dimensions - Kolmogorov - Smirnova

Dimensions	N	Statistics	Asymptotic sig. (bilateral)	Media	Deviation
Consideration for others	93	0,177	.000	38,67	30,551
Self-control in social relations	93	0,155	.000	50,26	29,440
Social withdrawal	93	0,209	.000	73,26	25,883
Social anxiety	93	0,120	.000	61,14	27,067
Leadership	93	0,150	.000	45,55	30,079
Sincerity	93	0,165	.000	39,69	31,273

Note: * $p \leq .005$



Based on the results obtained, a non-parametric test called Mann-Whitney test for independent samples, which replaces the T-test applied for normal distribution, is performed to make a comparison between groups.

Table 3.

Tests of independent samples in rural and urban Social Skills- Mann Whitney, grade.

Factors	Rural media	Urban media	Sig.
Consideration for others	44,32	34,93	0,258
Self-control in social relations	62,38	42,25	0,001*
Social withdrawal	65,03		0,004*
Social anxiety	50,46	68,20	0,005*
Leadership	42,92	47,29	0,457
Sincerity	35,70	42,32	0,331

Note: * $p \leq 0.005$

In the table above, the existence of significant differences was identified in relation to the dimensions of self-control, anxiety and social withdrawal. There is greater self-control in social relations in the rural area, while there is greater anxiety and social withdrawal in the urban institution. Likewise, it should be recognized that the means of the remaining social dimensions are not significant, so the scores are similar in the two institutions.

5. DISCUSSION

This research sought to compare the social skills of sixth grade students in two schools, one urban and the other rural, in the Santander region of Colombia. It was found that the largest number of participants corresponded to the urban institution (60.2%), a statistic that coincides with the percentage of access and enrollment in these areas. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2020) in the secondary education of rural youth, the percentage of access and enrollment at all educational levels tends to be lower compared to the entrance to urban institutions. In addition to the above, the high school dropout rate in urban areas is 18% and in rural areas the percentage triples, reaching 52%. These data are strengthened not only in the approach of access or permanence of students to secondary institutions, but are reflected in the few who can access higher education. This phenomenon is impacted by the migration of the population from the countryside to the city due to phenomena such as forced displacement and the armed conflict (Gil, 2022).

On the other hand, the age of the participants ranged from 11 to 14 years, with an average of 12 years.

Another variable analyzed was family composition, in urban institutions most students live with both parents, grandparents and siblings (54.05%), in rural areas there is a predominance of families with both parents (28.57%) as well as single mothers (26.79%).



These results are related to research conducted in Colombian peasant families in the municipalities of Natagaima (Tolima) and Sincé (Sucre). In this study, it was found that most families were headed by single mothers, who have the role of head in their extended family composition. The reason for this situation is that mothers tend to be younger, there is a greater presence of divorce and abandonment (Tacca et al., 2020).

The family structure is identified as nuclear, since it is composed of few members (mother, father and children), one of the reasons is based on the fact that women have assumed a leading role in the world of work, which has resulted in fewer children and the predominance of the nuclear family (Jurado, 2004). In relation to other sociodemographic data, it is evident that in urban institutions, stratum 3 predominates (44.64%), compared to rural schools, which are in stratum 1 (62.16%). There is research that agrees with the results obtained, Caballero et al. (2018) mentions a comparative study between social skills and aggressive behavior in Argentina (Tucumán) in 1,208 adolescents, with the socioeconomic variable of the young people being paramount. Application of the BAS-3, a questionnaire of Antisocial Behavior (CC-A) and a sociodemographic survey were made. When comparing social skills with socioeconomic level, significant statistical differences were found in the dimensions of self-control and leadership in young people from low strata located in rural areas, while adolescents from high strata presented greater withdrawal and social anxiety in urban areas. Thus, it is concluded that life conditions with greater adversity and deprivation lead adolescents to seek empathy and build good peer groups. On the contrary, adolescents with higher socioeconomic status tend to be more individualistic and competitive.

In fact, the above results are related to those of this research, where it was found that in the rural institution, the skills of consideration for others ($\mu=44.32$) and self-control in social relations ($\mu=62.38$) are more predominant. This shows that adolescents in rural areas tend to have empathetic, social and humble behaviors, which are important in the establishment of trusting and close bonds. With respect to the results obtained by Betoré and Quílez (2021), they mention that teachers perceived rural adolescents as more empathetic, sociable and active when carrying out social activities, such as educational learning processes. This shows a good development in terms of their social skills compared to urban institutions, where adolescents have greater ease in obtaining technological resources, which in turn can be a distractor in daily social interactions (González and Hernández, 2021).

This can be confirmed by the results obtained in this study, where adolescents from the urban school showed high levels of social withdrawal ($\mu=78.70$) and anxiety ($\mu=68.20$). However, they presented high levels of leadership ($\mu=47.29$), indicating high levels of popularity, initiative, and self-confidence. Authors such as Torres (2021) corroborate the above, showing that adolescents from urban areas have a good relationship between interpersonal communication and the development of social skills.

Another contribution of this research was to demonstrate that there are significant differences in relation to the dimensions of self-control, social anxiety and social withdrawal. The dimension of self-control is more developed in the social relations of students located in rural areas, demonstrating that they are more empathetic and collaborative. On the contrary, in urban institutions, students in rural areas are more empathetic and collaborative.

showed greater anxiety and social withdrawal, generating a vision of themselves as individualistic, self-sufficient and independent persons (Lotero Franco et al., 2020). This means that the means of the remaining social dimensions are not significant, since the scores obtained showed similar averages in the two institutions. This result is similar to other Latin American research, where the social skills of adolescents obtained an average and similar level in men and women (Medellín and Arroyo, 2022).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this research highlights the importance of considering geographic, socioeconomic, and family context when analyzing adolescents' social skills. The findings suggest that rural students tend to exhibit more empathetic and collaborative behaviors, while urban students may experience higher levels of social anxiety and withdrawal.

These results underscore the need to address contextual differences when designing educational and social development programs for adolescents in different settings. In addition, they highlight the importance of considering the influence of family and socioeconomic factors on social skill formation and the importance of fostering a balance between independence and social interaction in the education of urban adolescents. Overall, this research offers valuable insight into how context can shape the development of social skills in Colombian youth, in rural and urban institutions in Santander, as one of the study and research purposes of the Ministry of Education.

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Conflicts of interest

He does not declare any conflict of interest.



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