

# Socio-Emotional Skills For The Reduction Of Social Anxiety In University Students

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## Abstract

The objective of the research was to establish the influence of socio-emotional skills for the reduction of social anxiety in university students. Quantitative methodology was used to collect the information data, using the survey as a technique and the questionnaire as an instrument. The population consisted of 600 university students, divided into two groups, the control group was considered 300 students and the experimental group was considered 300 students. The socio-emotional skills intervention program decreases levels of social anxiety, reduces the levels of anxiety that is generated in the interaction with people who exercise authority, in the anxiety in the interaction with the opposite sex; Likewise, it decreases in the assertive expression of annoyance, decreases anxiety due to displeasure or anger. making a fool of yourself or making a fool of yourself and decreased anxiety about interacting with strangers; Therefore, socio-emotional skills facilitate relationships and promote emotional balance, enabling the ability to recognize, understand and manage their emotions.

**Keywords:** Socio-emotional skills, social anxiety, interaction, unpleasantness anxiety, assertive expression

## INTRODUCTION

It would be difficult, even almost impossible, to find a text on key skills for the 21st century that did not mention the rapid advance of science and technology, the speed of social change, and the unpredictability of the future. In fact, these factors cannot be ignored, since many of the students will have to be prepared to face many difficulties<sup>28</sup>.

The early onset of social anxiety in children may be associated with their social understanding and ability to express emotions adaptively. Socio-emotional strategies and their interaction are highlighted in the reduction of social anxiety<sup>9</sup>. Children can develop symptoms of social anxiety already at a young age, with potentially significant negative consequences for their social and emotional functioning<sup>14</sup>. Social anxiety refers to the fear or concern of being negatively evaluated during social interactions or social performance situations. If the anxiety is persistent and excessive, and substantially interferes with daily life, it meets the criteria for a social anxiety disorder (DSM-5)<sup>1</sup>.

Social anxiety disorder usually begins in childhood and lifetime prevalence is estimated to be approximately 8-13%<sup>16</sup>. Individual early sociocognitive development, and specifically theory of mind, may play an important role in the development of social anxiety. Theory of mind is the ability to understand and predict behavior based on mental states such as desires, intentions, emotions, beliefs and false beliefs<sup>27</sup>. This ability not only makes social interactions possible, but also helps people become more successful and popular in social life. A deficit in theory of mind in early childhood is related to negative outcomes, such as internalizing symptoms, and may increase the risk of developing social anxiety disorder<sup>3</sup>. Social-emotional development, such as children's ability to have socially appropriate reactions and to regulate their emotions during social situations, also presumably plays a role in social anxiety. Recent findings have shown that young children's propensity to express shyness in positive ways may help them regulate their social anxiety<sup>8</sup>.

Social anxiety is related to a number of negative student outcomes in the educational context, including physical symptoms of anxiety, reduced cognitive functioning, and poor academic performance. Despite the prevalence of social anxiety, little is known about the mechanisms that may underlie associations between social anxiety and outcomes in the context of higher education. Corroborating with a previous study, which found that social anxiety was negatively related to communication with teachers, socioemotional functioning, and student experiences, and academic communication accounted for significant variation in the links between social anxiety and student experiences. Additionally, there was at least some evidence that student experiences partially mediated the association between social anxiety and socioemotional functioning. Gender effects suggest that social anxiety is related to less communication with instructors, lower engagement and satisfaction, and poorer socioemotional functioning among women compared to men<sup>2</sup>.

Social fear refers to the fear of being negatively evaluated by others in social situations, such as interacting with new people or being the center of attention. At the behavioral level, fear is typically expressed through facial and body signs,

such as escape behaviors, gaze and head aversions, freezing, verbal vocalizations and fearful verbalizations, verbal hesitation, and response latency to the situation <sup>15</sup>.

Educational institutions exert great influence on the socialization of students and present them with increasing cognitive, social and emotional challenges <sup>13</sup>. In this sense, the need arises to design programs that foster the socio-emotional and creative skills of young people in public educational institutions <sup>11</sup>. Considering that socio-emotional skills are not taught in schools, but are affirmed <sup>22</sup>. In this sense, consider a humanistic approach that assumes that the greatest challenge facing schools is to prepare our young people for an uncertain future. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to determine the influence of socio-emotional skills for the reduction of social anxiety in university students.

Social anxiety refers to a fear of social situations in which the person may be the object of observation, evaluation or criticism by others <sup>10</sup>. The characteristics of these types of cases are keeping conversations with unknown people, speaking in public, going on a date with someone, attending social events, communicating with authorities, returning products in stores, expressing feelings and emotions, manifestation of unpleasant situations or not agreeing with someone, being the center of attention, being the product of a joke, showing nervousness before others. Symptoms of social anxiety produced for at least six months are referred to as the clinical syndrome of social anxiety disorder or social phobia <sup>23</sup>.

Social anxiety disorder is one of the most prevalent mental disorders with serious individual impairments and societal costs. Little is known about the mechanisms involved in the development of social anxiety. Here, I propose that dysregulated social emotions (social fear and shyness) are crucial to the development of social anxiety and that these dysregulated social emotions originate from alterations in sociocognitive abilities. While heightened fear may be rooted in deficits in sociocognitive skills, dysregulated shyness may be rooted in advanced sociocognitive skills. These findings imply that dysregulated social emotions play an important role in social anxiety and should be an explicit target in social anxiety treatments <sup>20</sup>.

Socioemotional behaviors are at the root of adaptive social interactions. They encompass knowing and respecting social norms, listening to and accepting the opinions of others, controlling negative emotions, and demonstrating positive behaviors in social situations, such as resolving conflicts or presenting a positive image to friends. These overlap with social awareness and relationship skills which are socio-emotional concepts. Appropriate social-emotional behaviors are required in educational institutions to develop good-quality relationships with friends and teachers, and to comply with school rules and systems. As mentioned above, programs designed to foster students' social awareness and relationship skills have been shown to positively influence school performance, with effects lasting for several years <sup>13,26</sup>. Socioemotional behaviors have been linked to decreased social anxiety.

The intervention to reduce social anxiety contemplates the socio-emotional skill of empathy, which is defined as the ability to understand and share the emotions of others. It includes both cognitive and affective components. Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to take the perspective of others, also called perspective taking, and is a key process for understanding and predicting the intentions and emotions of others. Enables effective communication and interaction with others <sup>26</sup>. Affective empathy reflects the ability to share the emotions of others and to respond appropriately to the distress of others. This ability is believed to be at the root of prosocial behaviors, protective driving, and helping behaviors <sup>19</sup>. Both components of empathy are essential for social interactions and have been proposed in the social awareness competency of socio-emotional skills <sup>17</sup>. In education, empathy is the basis for healthy relationships with teachers and classmates, thus favoring a good adaptation to the institution. It can also contribute to positive learning experiences in collaborative environments <sup>18</sup>.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology of the present study contemplates a quantitative approach and quasi-experimental design, carrying out the application of the social anxiety questionnaire for adults" (CASO), adapted for Peru, to groups, control and experimental to 600 university students. Once the pretest results were obtained, the social skills intervention program was applied to the experimental group. The objective of the program was to reduce social anxiety through the development of social skills, which considers the development of emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making in students. The main objectives of the program were to develop and improve: emotional self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, social awareness; and the development of interpersonal relationships.

In the present study, the adaptation of the "Social Anxiety Questionnaire for Adults" (CASO) <sup>10</sup> was used. This adaptation was called psychometric properties of the social anxiety questionnaire for adults in Peru <sup>23</sup>, validating the construct of the instrument, through the confirmatory factor analysis and obtained as a final result that the values of the saturations for each item fluctuated between .50 and .80, interpreting that the items have a strong relationship with the factors that belong to them and the capacities to represent them.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After carrying out the pretest of the control and experimental group, the intervention program of socio-emotional skills was developed for the university students of the experimental group, obtaining the following results:

**Table 1** Significance level of social anxiety before and after applying the socio-emotional skills program

Group		N	average range	sum of ranks	Pretest and Posttest		
Social anxiety_Prestest	Control	300	292.49	87745.50	Mann-Whitney U W for Wilcoxon Z Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	42595,500	9939,000
	Experimental	300	308.52	92554.50			
	Total	600					
Social anxiety_Postest	Control	300	417.37	125211.00		-1,133 , 257	-16,517 , 000
	Experimental	300	183.63	55089.00			
	Total	600					

In table 7, the social anxiety of the control and experimental groups present in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 9939,000 and  $z = -16,517$ , with a  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), so the hypothesis is rejected. Null and it was established that: There is an influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program on social anxiety in university students.

The interest in socio-emotional skills in education has grown considerably in the last decades<sup>21</sup> and there is now a large body of research showing its positive and adaptive role in education<sup>13,12</sup>.

Decision-making in the educational context plays an important educational role in most Western countries because they must consider the importance of students' socio-emotional skills, a better understanding of the relationships between these socio-emotional skills in social anxiety can help construct strategies that favor their joint development<sup>10</sup>. The hypothesis of this study is that socio-emotional skills as an intervention strategy assumes that better socio-emotional skills would allow students to reduce levels of social anxiety and better adapt to education, everyday situations and place them in conditions conducive to learning. It is believed that the School adjustment plays a key role in the relationship between socioemotional competencies and academic performance.

**Table 2** Level of significance of the interaction with people of authority before and after applying the social emotional skills program

Group		N	average range	sum of ranks	Pretest and Posttest		
Interaction with people of authority_Prestest	Control	300	308.69	92608.00	Mann-Whitney U W for Wilcoxon Z Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	42542,000	11038,500
	Experimental	300	292.31	87692.00			
	Total	600					
Interaction with people of authority_Postest	Control	300	413.71	124111.50		-1,162 , 245	-16,016 , 000
	Experimental	300	187.30	56188.50			
	Total	600					

In table 2, the interaction with people of authority of the control and experimental group present in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 11038.500 and  $z = -16.016$ , with a  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), for which the null hypothesis is rejected and It was established that: There is influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program in the interaction with people of authority in university students.

It is shown that the students who were able to obtain more social support with intervention programs to reduce anxiety levels or improve the novices of some variable and who were able to flexibly adapt their coping strategies in the face of anguish, showed the highest mental health results. positive during the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. This indicates that protective factors, namely socio-emotional skills, play an important role in reducing anxiety when interacting with people in authority. Therefore, in the current study, which aims to examine the efficacy of social-emotional skills interventions in reducing social anxiety.

**Table 3** Significance level of anxiety in interaction with the opposite sex before and after applying the socio-emotional skills program

Group		N	average range	sum of ranks	Pretest and Posttest		
Interaction with the opposite sex_Prestest	Control	300	287.47	86240.50	Mann-Whitney U W for Wilcoxon Z Asymptotic sig.(bilateral)	41090,500	14040,000
	Experimental	300	313.53	94059.50			
	Total	600					
Interaction with the opposite sex_Postest	Control	300	403.70	121110.00		-1,846 , 065	-14,603 , 000
	Experimental	300	197.30	59190.00			
	Total	600					

In table 3, the social anxiety in the interaction with the opposite sex of the control and experimental group presented in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 41090.500 and  $z = -14.603$ , with a  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and it was established that: There is an influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program on social anxiety in the interaction with the opposite sex in university students.

**Table 4** Significance level of the assertive expression of annoyance, displeasure or anger before and after applying the socio-emotional skills program

		Group	N	average range	sum of ranks	Pretest and Posttest	
Assertive expression of annoyance, displeasure or anger Pretest	Control		300	307.34	92201.50	Mann-Whitney U W for Wilcoxon Z	42948,500 88098,500 -, 968
	Experimental		300	293.66	88098.50		
	Total		600				
Assertive expression of annoyance, displeasure or anger Posttest	Control		300	395.21	118561.50	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	, 333 , 000
	Experimental		300	205.80	61738,50		
	Total		750				

In Table 4, the social anxiety in the assertive expression of annoyance, displeasure or anger in the control and experimental groups presented in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 42948.500 and  $z = -13.401$ , with  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), so the null hypothesis is rejected and it was established that: There is an influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program on social anxiety in the assertive expression of annoyance, displeasure or anger in university students. Verifying that the dysregulation of social emotions in social anxiety may be rooted in alterations in sociocognitive abilities. In fact, several studies found that deficits in sociocognitive skills are associated with higher levels of social anxiety <sup>6</sup>.

**Table 5** Significance level of showing up/making a fool of yourself before and after applying the social emotional skills program

		Group	N	average range	sum of ranks	Pretest and Posttest	
Being in evidence / Making a fool of yourself Pretest	Control		300	288.56	86567.50	Mann-Whitney U W for Wilcoxon Z	41417,500 86567,500 -1,691
	Experimental		300	312.44	93732.50		
	Total		600				
Posttest Ridiculous	Control		300	420.63	126187.50	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	, 091 , 000
	Experimental		300	180.38	54112.50		
	Total		750				

In table 5, the social anxiety when showing up/making a fool of the control and experimental groups present in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 41417.500 and  $z = -17.004$ , with a  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), so the null hypothesis is rejected and it was established that: There is an influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program on social anxiety by being exposed / Making a fool of university students.

**Table 6** Significance level of interaction with strangers before and after applying

		ranks			Pretest and Posttest		
		Group	N	average range	sum of ranks		
Interaction with strangers Pretest	Control		300	295.48	88645.00	And Mann-Whitney W of Wilcoxon Z	68622,000 139122,000 -, 574
	Experimental		300	305.52	91655,00		
	Total		600				
Interaction with strangers Posttest	Control		300	408.98	122693.00	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	, 566 , 000
	Experimental		300	192.02	57607,00		
	Total		750				

In table 6, it was found that the interaction with strangers from the control and experimental groups presented in the U-Mann-Whitney test: 10450,000 and  $z = -20,209$  with  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), so rejects the null hypothesis and it was established that: There is influence of the application of the socio-emotional skills program in the interaction with strangers in university students.

The results revealed the differential effectiveness of socioemotional skills in reducing mental anxiety. The present study serves as a first step for the future application of low-cost, scalable interventions at a broader level to reduce social anxiety and develop social skills in the face of global stressors.

The role of the teacher in reducing social anxiety plays a major role, since most successful people had at least one teacher who made a real difference in their life, because the teacher acted as a role model, or took a genuine interest in the student's well-being and future, or provided emotional support when the student needed it <sup>24,29-49</sup>. The discussion provides concrete suggestions for education professionals to increase support for students experiencing social anxiety.

## CONCLUSIONS

After an exhaustive analysis, the following conclusions are reached: The socio-emotional skills intervention program reduces levels of social anxiety, reduces the levels of anxiety that is generated in the interaction with people who exercise authority, in the anxiety in the interaction with the opposite sex; Likewise, it decreases in the assertive expression of annoyance, decreases anxiety due to displeasure or anger, being exposed or making a fool of itself, and decreased anxiety due to interaction with strangers; Therefore, socio-emotional skills facilitate relationships and promote emotional balance, enabling the ability to recognize, understand and manage their emotions.

Teachers should develop intervention programs considering a set of interpersonal socioemotional skills (cognitive and affective empathy, socioemotional behaviors, and collective orientation), school adjustment measures (adaptation to the institution, school anxiety, self-regulation at school, and self-perceived competence). Self-regulation in education represents the most important mediating pathway. More specifically, self-regulation mediates relationships between interpersonal socioemotional skills and decreased emotional anxiety.

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