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# PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

## *INTERVENÇÃO PSICOLÓGICA COM UNIVERSITÁRIOS PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO DA HABILIDADE SOCIAL DE RESOLUÇÃO DE CONFLITOS*

## *INTERVENCIÓN PSICOLÓGICA CON UNIVERSITARIOS PARA EL DESARROLLO DE LA HABILIDAD SOCIAL DE RESOLUCIÓN DE CONFLICTOS*

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**ABSTRACT:** Socialization, an essential process for integrating individuals into society, relies on the development of social skills, such as conflict resolution. This skill is crucial for fostering healthy relationships and academic success in the university context. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between social skills and the university environment, focusing on the acquisition of conflict resolution skills. Through an integrative literature review, challenges faced by university students—such as time management, mental health, healthy habits, and career planning—were identified, along with effective interventions to address them. The results indicated that strategies like time management workshops, psychological support, health promotion, and professional guidance contribute to developing these competencies. Therefore, the study proposes practical interventions that can be implemented in the university setting to promote a more harmonious and inclusive academic experience.

**KEYWORDS:** Social skills. Conflict resolution. University students. Psychological interventions. Health promotion.

***RESUMO:*** *A socialização, processo essencial para a integração do indivíduo à sociedade, depende do desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais, como a resolução de conflitos. No contexto universitário, essa habilidade é indispensável para promover relacionamentos saudáveis e sucesso acadêmico. Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar a relação entre habilidades sociais e o ambiente universitário, com foco na aquisição da habilidade de resolução de conflitos. Por meio de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, foram identificados desafios enfrentados por universitários, como gestão do tempo, saúde mental, hábitos saudáveis e planejamento de carreira, além de intervenções eficazes para superá-los. Os resultados indicaram que estratégias como workshops de gestão do tempo, apoio psicológico, promoção da saúde e orientação profissional contribuem para o desenvolvimento dessas competências. Assim, o estudo propõe intervenções práticas que podem ser implementadas no ambiente universitário, promovendo uma formação mais harmoniosa e inclusiva.*

***PALAVRAS-CHAVE:*** *Habilidades sociais. Resolução de conflitos. Universitários. Intervenções psicológicas. Promoção da saúde.*

***RESUMEN:*** *La socialización, un proceso esencial para la integración del individuo en la sociedad, depende del desarrollo de habilidades sociales, como la resolución de conflictos. En el contexto universitario, esta habilidad es indispensable para fomentar relaciones saludables y el éxito académico. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la relación entre las habilidades sociales y el entorno universitario, con énfasis en la adquisición de la habilidad de resolución de conflictos. A través de una revisión integrativa de la literatura, se identificaron desafíos enfrentados por los universitarios, como la gestión del tiempo, la salud mental, los hábitos saludables y la planificación de carrera, además de intervenciones efectivas para superarlos. Los resultados indicaron que estrategias como talleres de gestión del tiempo, apoyo psicológico, promoción de la salud y orientación profesional contribuyen al desarrollo de estas competencias. Así, el estudio propone intervenciones prácticas que pueden implementarse en el ámbito universitario, promoviendo una formación más armoniosa e inclusiva.*

***PALABRAS CLAVE:*** *Habilidades sociales. Resolución de conflictos. Universitarios. Intervenciones psicológicas. Promoción de la salud.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Individuals do not automatically become active members of society when they are born. In order to integrate fully, they need to go through a process of socialization, which takes place throughout their development. In this process, the individual externalizes what is subjective and internalizes what is objective, a process that is fundamental to the construction of interpersonal relationships and the formation of individual reality (Berger; Luckmann, 2004).

For Almeida and Carvalho (2007), the interaction between the individual, the environment, and society is essential for acquiring socio-emotional skills and building social relationships, a concept that depends directly on the social skills developed and maintained throughout life. Social skills include empathy, communication, civility, assertiveness, interpersonal relationships, and conflict resolution (Carnegie, 2012).

According to Del Prette and Del Prette (2017), social skills can be understood as a set of socially valued behaviors in a specific culture, with a high chance of generating benefits for both the individual and their group and community, as well as favoring effective performance in interpersonal situations. Socio-emotional competencies and social skills play a crucial role and are essential for promoting well-being and maintaining interpersonal relationships (Del Prette; Del Prette, 2017). Del Prette and Del Prette (2009) propose six interdependent classes of social skills that are important for satisfactory interpersonal relationships in adolescence: empathy, self-control, civility, assertiveness, social-sexual approach, and social resourcefulness.

Several Social Skills Programs (SSPs) have been applied to develop these classes (Kilian; Kilian, 2011; Leme *et al.*, 2016; Murta *et al.*, 2012; Murta *et al.*, 2010), thus demonstrating that they are essential for relationships, but are not the only ones and depend on other skills such as problem-solving (Kilian; Kilian, 2011; Silva; Murta, 2009).

Through these skills, it is possible to interact effectively, express feelings, and understand the emotions of others as well as one's own (Del Prette; Del Prette, 2017). They are influenced by various factors, such as environment, behavior, cognition, emotion and physiology. The absence or inefficiency of these skills can result in behavioral and emotional changes, leading to psychological disorders manifested in internalizing and externalizing problems (Del Prette; Del Prette, 2005).

Conflicts are an inherent characteristic of human beings, and understanding their origins is essential to promoting effective mediation. According to Loche (2002), conflicts can be classified into two categories: endoconflict, which refers to internal conflicts, and exoconflict, which involves interpersonal and external interactions. Strategies such as dialog, active listening, and playful activities can improve learning and strengthen socio-emotional bonds.

In the university academic environment, where interaction is constant, the need to


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master social skills becomes even more evident, with conflict resolution skills being one of the most relevant, given their importance for maintaining healthy relationships and for the successful completion of the academic cycle. Conflict resolution skills involve dealing with disagreements and differences in a constructive way, seeking peaceful solutions, and negotiating effectively to preserve the harmony of an individual and their environment. According to Robbins (2009), conflict is a process in which one individual seeks to eliminate another's efforts to achieve a goal, resulting in frustration for both parties involved. This lack of understanding is common in the university environment, where different values, needs, opinions, and desires can clash, generating disagreements and divergences (Torrego, 2003).

When addressing these conflicts, it is essential to understand the perspectives involved and find solutions that meet the needs of all parties. Thus, conflict resolution skills not only contribute to maintaining a harmonious academic environment, but also promote the development of healthy and productive interpersonal relationships (Soares, 2017). By mastering this skill, individuals are able to face the challenges of academic life more effectively and build more resilient and collaborative relationships (Lantyer *et al.*, 2016; Gaiotto; Soares, 2020).

One of the main differences observed in this environment is the age range of the courses, which includes adults in various age groups. The predominant age group among the students is between 20 and 24, a period that the World Health Organization classifies as the young adult phase (Brasil, 2007; Gomes, 2024).

From the perspective that conflict is associated with an impasse, it is important to recognize that everyone faces conflict. The way we deal with it may vary, but it is an integral part of our lives and indicates the need to develop new strategies for situations that we can't resolve with our immediate actions. In the university context, these conflicts can be exacerbated and take on greater dimensions than they really are (Lantyer *et al.*, 2016; Gaiotto; Soares, 2021).

Promoting a healthy and productive university environment through developing effective conflict resolution skills is crucial for academic success and training well-prepared professionals. In view of this research problem, this study aims to analyze the relationship between social skills, especially conflict resolution, among university students. The study proposes the design and application of interventions and dynamics designed to contribute to the development of these skills. In addition, the aim is to propose concrete strategies that can be implemented to improve students' social skills and, consequently, their academic experience.


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## METHODS

This study complies with Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council, which establishes Guidelines and Regulatory Norms for Research Involving Human Beings. It should be emphasized that this study does not involve the direct application of interventions to young people, but rather the design of an action project aimed at collaborating with the development of social skills.

To achieve the proposed objective, an integrative literature review was carried out after identifying the problem. This method allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the main dilemmas and difficulties faced in the university environment. The search for articles was carried out through the Regional Portal of the VHL (Virtual Health Library), which provides access to databases: MEDLINE; LILACS; WPRIM (Index Medicus Western Pacific); INDEXPSI (Index Psicologia Periódicos), BDENF (Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde Enfermagem); IBECS (Índice Bibliográfico Español en Ciencias de la Salud). In addition to the VHL, the SciELO database was also used. The searches were carried out in Portuguese and English, and the descriptors used were (resolução de conflitos) AND (universitários) as well as their English counterparts (university students) AND (conflicts).

The studies were selected by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to identify the most relevant studies. Those that addressed interventions and programs to develop social skills in the university environment were selected. After selection, a critical analysis of the chosen studies was carried out, focusing on methodologies, results, and implications for practice. The quality of the studies was assessed to ensure the validity and reliability of the evidence collected, enabling the findings to be integrated. The most effective interventions and practices for developing social skills among university students were highlighted. Based on the synthesis of the results, examples of practical interventions that can be applied in the university context to promote the development of the social skill of conflict resolution were drawn up.

## RESULTS

A total of 109 articles were found in the databases, distributed as shown in Table 1.


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**Table 1** - Distribution of Articles by Database

| DATABASE | NUMBER OF ARTICLES | PERCENTAGE (%) |
|---|---|---|
| *MEDLINE* | 73 | 66.97% |
| *LILACS* | 17 | 15.60% |
| *WPRIM (Pacífico Ocidental)* | 8 | 7.34% |
| *Index Psicologia Periódicos* | 7 | 6.42% |
| *BDENF - Enfermagem* | 2 | 1.83% |
| *IBECS* | 2 | 1.83% |
| *SciELO* | 4 | 3.67% |
| **Total** | **109** | **100%** |

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The data indicates that most of the relevant articles were found in the MEDLINE database, representing around two-thirds of the total. The other databases contributed a smaller proportion of articles, with LILACS, WPRIM, and Index Psicologia Periódicos standing out as notable sources, while BDENF, IBECS, and SciELO contributed less.

Analysis of the articles reveals that conflict should not be understood as a static or immutable entity, but as an interactional process that is essential to human life. Conflict is seen as a component of interrelationship events and, fundamentally, as a factor that generates positive or negative change, depending on the approach taken to it, especially in university environments.

With regard to the conflicts and difficulties faced by university students, these were categorized into the following main areas:

1. **Time Management**: Many university students face significant difficulties in managing their time effectively. This includes organizing your study routines, meeting deadlines for academic tasks, and balancing academic and personal commitments. Studies indicate that the overload of academic and extracurricular activities often results in stress and anxiety (Santos *et al.*, 2019).
2. **Mental Health**: The mental health of university students is a growing concern. Academic pressure, combined with personal issues and the transition to adulthood, can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. During the pandemic, these conditions were exacerbated due to social isolation, uncertainty about the future, and adaptation to remote teaching (Silva *et al.*, 2021).
3. **Physical Activity and Eating Habits**: The literature highlights that many university students find it challenging to maintain a routine of physical activity and a balanced


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diet. Lack of time, limited resources, and the absence of health promotion policies at universities contribute to this scenario (Silva; Boing, 2021).

4. **Career Planning:** Uncertainty about their professional future is a common concern among university students. The pandemic has intensified these uncertainties, affecting students' perceptions of their career prospects and the stability of the job market (Gomes; Fernandes, 2020).

The data indicates that many of the difficulties university students face have intensified in the last ten years, with a significant exacerbation during the period of confinement imposed by the pandemic. These challenges have hampered the acquisition and development of socio-emotional competencies and social skills among adolescents and young adults (Gomes, 2024).

In view of this, higher education institutions must reinforce their strategies to support student retention, promoting a healthy and inclusive academic environment (Gaiotto; Soares, 2021). Among the problems identified, various types of interventions and programs have proven effective in mitigating these difficulties. These include:

1. **Workshops and Time Management Training**: Programs that offer specific training in time management techniques have helped students to better organize their routines and increase their academic productivity (Pereira *et al.*, 2017).
2. **Psychological Support Services**: Implementing psychological support and counseling services at universities has been crucial in supporting students' mental health. Interventions based on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) have been shown to be particularly effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Gaiotto; Soares, 2021).
3. **Health Promotion Programs**: Universities that implement programs to encourage regular physical activity and healthy eating see significant improvements in students' general well-being. Partnerships with gyms and workshops on nutrition are examples of successful initiatives (Lopes; Zukowsky-Tavares, 2018).
4. **Professional Guidance and Mentoring**: Career guidance and mentoring programs help students plan their careers and make informed decisions about their professional future. These initiatives include talks with professionals in the field, individualized mentoring sessions and career development workshops (Ribeiro, 2018).

Institutions should consider implementing integrated programs that address time management, mental health, physical activity, eating habits and career planning in a light and didactic way in order to hold students' attention (Pereira-Guizzo *et al.*, 2018).


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One of the most appropriate proposals is the implementation of interventions and dynamics led by a professional psychologist, with a previously delimited period. These initiatives must be continually evaluated and adjusted on the basis of feedback from students and changes in the educational context. In this sense, we suggest the use of behavioral records during interventions, which should document both the behaviors of participating students and those who chose not to participate. This method will allow effective monitoring of participants' progress and enable adjustments and improvements to be made to the approaches used (Gomes, 2024). The recommended type of behavioral recording is continuous cursive recording.

The dynamics proposed for the intervention should be varied and attractive to students, carried out continuously, and adapted to their needs, taking into account the particularities of the university environment (Brandão, 2024). It is recommended that the first dynamic works as an "icebreaker" activity, so that the students understand the purpose of the intervention and are aware of the process that will be carried out. At the end of the intervention, during the last dynamic, it is ideal to take a moment to provide feedback to the students and collect their impressions of the activities carried out in the classroom.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study addressed the importance of the social skill of conflict resolution in the university context, highlighting that conflicts are inherent to human interactions and can be intensified in the university environment by various factors, such as inadequate time management, fragile mental health, and uncertainties about the professional future. The lack of appropriate interventions to develop this skill can negatively affect student academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, implementing specific psychological interventions, such as time management workshops, psychological support services, health promotion programs, and professional guidance, is fundamental for developing conflict resolution skills and other socio-emotional competencies.

Developing conflict resolution skills through well-structured psychological interventions contributes not only to the academic training of university students, but also to building a more harmonious and inclusive educational environment. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in this process and should invest in integrated programs that promote students' personal and social development, preparing them to face the challenges of academic and professional life with greater resilience and competence.


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