

A panoramic review of soft skills training in university students

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Abstract

Universities are currently assuming a fundamental challenge in the construction of society, for which they are called upon to pay special attention in the training of soft skills as an essential part of the integral formation. The aim of this theoretical study is to provide the pedagogue with a clear conceptualization based on a panoramic review of the literature of classical authors, specifying the general definition of the concept and of each of the skills, reviewing the theory of social learning as a reference model for training, and presenting the main practices and strategies to be promoted in the context of higher education to develop them. It is concluded emphasizing the need to build, modify or transform teaching practice in order to promote a scenario of higher education focusing on the parallel development of being and doing.

Keywords: Skill learning; colleges; literature review.

Una revisión panorámica al entrenamiento de las habilidades blandas en estudiantes universitarios

Resumen

Las universidades en la actualidad asumen un reto fundamental en la construcción de sociedad, por lo que están llamadas a prestar especial interés en el entrenamiento de las habilidades blandas como parte esencial de la formación integral. El presente estudio teórico tiene como objetivo suministrar al pedagogo una conceptualización clara a partir de una revisión panorámica de la literatura de autores clásicos, por lo que se precisa la definición general del concepto y de cada una de las habilidades, se revisa la teoría del aprendizaje social como modelo referencial para el entrenamiento y se presentan las principales prácticas y estrategias a fomentar en los contextos de educación superior para desarrollarlas. Se concluye destacando la necesidad de construir, modificar o transformar la práctica docente con la finalidad de propiciar un escenario de educación superior interesado en el desarrollo paralelo del ser y el hacer.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje de habilidades; universidades; revisión de literatura.

Uma revisão panorâmica ao treinamento das habilidades simples em estudantes universitários

Resumo

As universidades na atualidade assumem um desafio fundamental na construção da sociedade, pelo que são chamadas a prestar especial interesse no treinamento das habilidades simples como parte essencial da formação integral. O presente estudo teórico tem como objetivo fornecer ao pedagogo uma conceitualização clara a partir de uma revisão panorâmica da literatura de autores clássicos, pelo que se precisa a definição geral do conceito e de cada uma das habilidades, se revisa a teoria da aprendizagem social como modelo referencial para o treinamento e se apresentam as principais práticas e estratégias a fomentar nos contextos de educação superior para serem desenvolvidas. Conclui-se destacando a necessidade de construir, modificar ou transformar a prática docente com a finalidade de propiciar um cenário de educação superior interessado no desenvolvimento paralelo do ser e o fazer.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem de habilidade; universidades; revisão de literatura.

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Introduction

Training in technical skills or “hard skills” - as cognitive skills are referred to - for the development of a profession have been and, in some cases, continue to be of central interest to higher education institutions, given that as mentioned by Singer, Guzmán & Donoso (2009), the evaluation of educational institutions at national and international level is carried out through instruments that measure skills of this type, such as the SABER-PRO (Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación, 2016) and PISA (Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos, 2016) tests. Indeed, in some cases these have been considered necessary to obtain good employment and professional success (Bassi, Busso, Urzua, & Vargas, 2012). However, this aspect is contradictory as it has also been found that the results of these tests and academic reports are not necessarily predictors of professional success (Singer et al., 2009).

In recent years and as a result of an approach to social and pedagogical reality, it has been identified that the training and development of soft skills in university students should be of central interest to higher education institutions since they are closely related to personal well-being, social adjustment, and adaptation to the work context (Raciti, 2015). However, very few studies have focused on evaluating the effect of soft skills training on university students and its relationship to job performance. Some exploratory studies were carried out by John (2009), Singer et al. (2009), Fernández and Tapia (2012), Albarrán and González (2015) and Gómez, Manrique-Lozada and Gasca-Hurtado (2015) but further research is still required in the field.

Interest in the area also originates from dimensioning the social changes facing the world with the advancement of globalization because, as time goes by, people are more frequently confronted with hostile situations that challenge individuals' ability to adapt to the environment (de la Fuente, 2012). Academia must recognize this reality, be prepared to transform the classic models of education, and respond by teaching strategies to mitigate these difficulties. This, in turn, should lead newly graduated university students today to be appropriately trained to solve everyday problems, lead and direct groups, be proactive and have the capacity to generate and undertake ideas in the face of adversities for employability (Agudelo, 2015). Thus, developing soft skills in university students is essential to assuming these new challenges (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

For the purposes of the study, a panoramic literature review (Guirao, 2015) was conducted to identify classical theoretical approaches that could contribute to the construction and advancement of practical guides for training in soft skills. Initially, extensive searches were conducted without establishing a time frame of reference, on Google, Google Scholar, Ebsco and Scopus of the key terms “soft skills” and the same term but in Spanish “habilidades blandas”. However, in some cases, to define each of the skills, we had to search using key terms in relation to each skill, for example “cooperation”. Subsequently, the results of this

search were classified according to type of material, source, authors, year, abstract, and keywords. The documents were reviewed in depth identifying four fundamental aspects: (1) the definition of the concept of soft skills; (2) the definition of one or more soft skills (3); the identification of conceptual references related to learning theories and personality that will help to understand the development of soft skills; and (4) previous training experiences, identifying strategies and activities used.

Finally, from the panoramic analysis of the literature, the following theoretical-practical approach was derived in order to define soft skills; review the two structural postures for their approach; establish the relationship that exists between them, human development, and comprehensive training; highlight the responsibility of the university context in training in soft skills; and presenting different strategies and activities that enable such training in higher education.

What are soft skills?

The concept of soft skills is comparable to the concept of life skills proposed by the World Health Organization, Division of Mental Health (1994) which defines them as a set of socio-affective skills that are necessary for interaction with others and that make it possible to cope with everyday demands and challenging situations. For example, they enable the individual to make decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, recognize the emotions of others, and build healthy relationships at physical and emotional levels (World Health Organization, 2003). However, the concept of soft skills differs from that of social skills, because although they are generally concepts that are usually equated, it is important to clarify that social skills are part of soft skills but the latter are additionally formed by skills to learn, analyze, manage time, and innovate. These aspects go beyond the set of skills that allow interaction with others. Starting to make these distinctions will be key to accurately and clearly assess the challenges involved in the approach to and training in soft skills.

Thus, life skills are made up of three categories, the first category involves interpersonal skills that include skills for assertive communication, negotiation, trust, cooperation and empathy; the second category - cognitive skills - involves skills for problem solving, decision-making, critical thinking, self-evaluation, analysis and understanding of consequences; finally, the third category involves skills for emotional control, although at present, they are normally known as skills for emotional recognition and management in situations of stress and intense feelings, such as anger, sadness, and frustration. These three categories are generally not used independently; so one situation may involve the use of several skills from different categories. Thus, each category complements the other (Mangrulkar, Whitman, & Posner, 2001).

Next, we provide a brief definition of the main soft skills. It is fundamental to consider that there is no single definition for any of the cases, all soft skills have been measu-

red from different perspectives and the definitions presented only serve to highlight a conceptualization that integrates the basic elements of each skill. The first interpersonal skill is assertive, efficient, or effective communication. It is understood as a skill that allows verbal and non-verbal expression of feelings and perception in any situation without hurting others or allowing one's rights to be violated, so that assertive communication involves the expression of feelings by providing feedback without judgment and receiving feedback from active listening (van-der Hofstadt & Gómez, 2013).

The second interpersonal skill is negotiation, which is related to assertive communication and provides an alternative means of resolving conflicts and differences, since it requires the ability to generate different strategies or alternatives in order to dissipate the differences or disagreements that may arise in the interaction between two or more people. Thus, negotiation as an interpersonal skill allows us to reduce aggression and improve interaction with others, seeking to establish mutual agreement and diminish possible negative consequences resulting from divergences vis-à-vis the same event or situation (Vicuña, Hernández, Paredes, & Rios, 2008).

On the other hand, interpersonal trust, a complex and fundamental soft skill in social competence, is defined by Yáñez (2008) as the acceptance to be vulnerable to the actions of others, hoping that these execute positive behaviors that are coherent to common interests, even when there is no possibility of vigilance and control of such actions.

Cooperation is understood as the execution of joint actions in a coordinated manner to carry out a task or activity and fulfill shared objectives (Argyle, 2013). Similarly, in basic psychology, cooperation is understood as an attitude where the individual is in favor of the collective and benefits mutually. Thus, cooperation reveals a willingness to be useful; there is openness to communication and trust as well as a high sensitivity to common interests, and the growth of mutual human potential. This means that, when working in cooperation, individuals distance themselves from the desire for power (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2011).

The last interpersonal skill is empathy. Defined as the ability to understand the feelings and emotions of others, empathy is considered indispensable in human relations and has been related to social cognition. That is, to the way one perceives and thinks about others, which would imply emotional recognition, perspective taking and mentalization (López, Filippetti, & Richaud, 2013). Tobón, Zapata, Lopera and Duque (2014) believe that empathy is understood as a process of cognitive and emotional regulation, which aims to identify and respond coherently to the emotional state of others and, as such, inhibit dissocial behaviors.

Also, problem solving as a cognitive ability refers to a person's ability to understand and solve tasks or activities that they have accepted but do not know how to do (Rojas de Escalona, 2010). This has led authors such as Weisberg (1989) to consider that problem solving requires cognitive restructuring in terms of changing the way the problem is interpreted, felt, and perceived. Finally, it is important to mention that this skill requires thinking skills that allow the

identification, definition and decomposition of a complex problem, the exploration of possible solution alternatives, the evaluation of the consequences of the alternatives, and solution selection and implementation (Sternberg, 1986).

Critical thinking has been a topic of interest for several authors; Chaves (2016) considers it a key skill for today's world, considering that society at this time requires people capable of processing information to make the best decisions. In this respect, it defines critical thinking as a skill that allows one to think in a self-directed, self-disciplined, self-regulated, and self-corrected manner. As such, the development of this skill implies having the ability to verify information and to think differently or to raise questions and assume positions in relation to the information in question.

Decision-making is a skill that implies the possibility of choosing an effective and constructive form of action or actions to be carried out in different situations and contexts of daily life (World Health Organization Division of Mental Health, 1994). It is a skill that requires executive functions to initiate, supervise, evaluate, and control behavior (Martínez-Selva, Sánchez-Navarro, Bechara, & Román, 2006) as well as to explore past experiences and consequences in order to choose between one or another option.

Self-evaluation is a process by which the person issues an evaluation of his/her own work and performance, with the objective of identifying whether there is a discrepancy between the performance achieved and the desired performance; i.e., that self-evaluation allows the monitoring and evaluation of thought and behavior as well as to identify strategies for improvement (McMillan & Hearn, 2008). Because of this, self-evaluation is a complex skill that has a significant impact on learning since it determines the selection of tasks or strategies and requires mental representation and knowledge of the task or activity to be evaluated (Kostons, Van Gog, & Paas, 2012).

Individuals' ability to analyze and understand the consequences implies the identification of the alternatives that contribute to the solution of a problem or decision-making, considering the short, medium, and long-term effects of the application or execution of each of these alternatives (D'Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971). Following this, the person must carry out a reflexive process in which, according to the values and experiences, he or she establishes which alternatives produce more beneficial consequences or are more acceptable (Squillace & Picón-Janeiro, 2010).

The last category of soft skills includes emotional management skills. For authors such as Gratz and Roemer (2004), there is a key distinction between emotional control and emotional regulation or modulation, and emotional management skills are understood as a set of skills for consciously processing, accepting, coping with, and naming emotions in specific situations as well as identifying the physiological reactions they produce (Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2002). Adequate emotional management involves the inhibition of inappropriate behaviors, regular physiological activation, focus of attention, and self-awareness (Linehan & Koerner, 1993).

The reduced notion of soft skills as aspects of personality

In reviewing the literature, it was found that in many cases, the development of soft skills is related to personality traits, an aspect that would theoretically lead to establishing that they cannot necessarily be modified through training (Moss & Tilly, 1996; Brunello & Schlotter, 2011; Nitonde, 2014). Indeed, authors such as Cunha and Heckman (2007) mention that if soft skills are considered personality traits, an impact on and development of these traits could only be evidenced when training at very early ages, that is, during childhood. In this sense, the university context would have little or no effect on their development or strengthening.

However, it is also recognized that in many cases, soft skills training does not take place in childhood or adolescence given that, as indicated above, educational models have focused their efforts on the development of cognitive competencies. On the other hand, pre-adolescence (between 12 and 14 years) and middle adolescence (between 14 and 16 years) are periods generally characterized by different needs in terms of socialization, interaction and social support (Krauskopof, 1999) in which complex relationships with peers, parents and authority figures are common (Mangrulkar et al., 2001). Such aspects would clearly hinder the development of soft skills.

However, authors such as Thieme (2007) mention that the soft skills in university students are not a product of the training provided by the institution of higher education and that, on the contrary, they respond to the students' own characteristics (personality) and interaction with the work context. However, it is worth pointing out that clearly, the development of soft skills will not be the product of the university context until universities assume it as a responsibility and identify it as a fundamental element in students' education. In short, until it recognizes that there are formal and informal niches in the classroom that model and shape competencies for interaction with others and enable the development of the student as individuals.

It is for this reason that Raciti (2015) points out that the institutions that have been interested in the subject have focused on personality aspects that do not necessarily have an impact on the development of soft skills so that, even when advocating for the development of social-emotional skills from infancy, it is fundamental to appeal for training in soft skills in late adolescence and in early adulthood. This is because, it is in this evolutionary period, when people begin their professional lives, that they will have a better disposition for socialization (Musitu & Cava, 2003), as effective social interactions are an indispensable factor in the establishment of successful relationships in the family, university, and the work area (Mangrulkar et al., 2001).

Soft skills as behavioral patterns that people can be trained in

On the other hand, based on the literature review, we consider that the theory of social learning provides a clear

theoretical support regarding why an active learning pedagogy is effective for training in soft skills (Wenger, 2001), pointing out how people learn simple and complex behavioral patterns by observing others. Furthermore, the theory highlights that the incorporation of behavioral patterns into the behavioral repertoire is enabled through multiple assays, establishing that behaviors are determined by interactions occurring in the environment (Bandura, 1977).

Likewise, social learning theory emphasizes that people are not endowed with a behavioral repertoire or innate abilities and thus, it recognizes that these are learned socially. That is, people can be trained in such skills through observation and modeling. However, based within the same theoretical perspective it is proposed that emotional responses are also learned through observation (Bandura, 1977), hence, for example, the cultural differences in the emotional reactions of people from the East and those from the West. In this respect, it is also possible to train people in social-emotional skills such as empathy, self-control and emotional modulation in adverse situations.

This change in the conception of the teaching-learning process of soft skills is fundamental since it recognizes that the influences of the environment affect the behavioral repertoires developed by the individual, through intermediate cognitive processes such as imagination, representation, and thought that are indispensable for their development. That is to say, that the theory of social learning can be the theoretical foundation in which educators find support to promote and defend the need for direct training in soft skills.

Monjas (1999) established an interesting and applicable model for direct skills training. The first stage involves an initial assessment to determine which skills people should be trained in. This phase is considered important for training in soft skills in the university context because it is recognized that the student upon entering higher education may have already developed some soft skills and even more so if he or she has already had contact with the work context. However, this does not imply that training is not required for other such skills that they have not yet developed.

The second stage is a period of verbal instruction in which each skill is described, explained, defined and exemplified, so that students can recognize the importance of developing the skill both personally and professionally (Monjas, 1999). At this stage, it is important for instruction to be carried out through experiential or experiential learning, a methodology that has been shown to generate greater impact and recall among students (Lagos, 2012).

The third stage corresponds to modeling. At this stage, the trainer or "trainer therapist" emits the behavioral pattern in a detailed, sequenced, and repeated manner. That is to say, in this phase, the desired behavior becomes evident, indicating the practical applicability of the skill, without omitting any element in the execution, following a step-by-step methodology, and reiterative practice (Monjas, 1999). This phase of modeling, in the case of soft skills, requires the trainer's creativity to generate those simulated situations

to enable training in skills that are as complex as critical thinking or emotional management.

The fourth stage involves a behavioral rehearsal, in which the student develops the simulated practice of the skill previously modeled repetitively and in different situations (Monjas, 1999). Thus, in soft skills training, it is fundamental that the student, after modeling, performs what has been observed in the educational context.

In the fifth stage, the trainer provides feedback to the student about the behavioral rehearsal. This feedback can be informative or corrective. In the first stage, the trainer provides information about how the student performed the practice, pointing out aspects performed correctly and those aspects that require improvement. The trainer can use videos or recordings to support this. Subsequently, the student performs behavioral rehearsal taking into account the feedback while the trainer performs skill shaping in the student, reinforcing successive approximations to the desired behavioral pattern (Monjas, 1999). This stage is fundamental in soft skills training as it is when real development of the skill takes place. It must be recognized that effective feedback is not only about pointing out negative or positive aspects; effective feedback has no other purpose than to specifically point out the behavioral aspects that should be modified and those that should be maintained (Poorman, 2003).

In the sixth stage, before promoting the application of the skill in the student's work and personal context, the trainer must assign tasks directed at the generalization of the behavioral patterns relating to the skill. These tasks must be precise, indicating where, with whom, how and when to put the skill into practice. In addition, following the practice, a dialogue should take place with respect to the application and a process of self-evaluation and feedback. Finally, Monjas (2002) proposes that the trainer propitiate the extension, generalization, and maintenance of the behavioral repertoires learned in the student's natural and daily environments. This last stage is one of the most important as it is expected for the student to be able to generalize the application of the soft skills he or she has learned in the context of higher education to work scenarios and personal interaction.

Soft skills, human development, and comprehensive training

Soft skills are fundamental for students' professional and personal training, hence the case for comprehensive training in higher education institutions. High-quality conceptual training becomes almost irrelevant if personal training is left aside. Indeed, for over a decade now, soft skills have been considered indispensable for the proper exercise of citizenship, respect for human rights, and creative conflict resolution (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015).

In addition, the World Health Organization, through its global school health initiative, has recognized soft skills as a

priority mental health promotion strategy (Ippolito-Shepherd & Cerqueira, 2003).

The comprehensive training of university students requires them to be taught the theoretical and practical knowledge relating to a profession, but also methodologies aimed at promoting autonomy in learning, creativity for problem solving, critical thinking, commitment to society, and persistence in the face of adversity. Therefore, comprehensive training requires training for doing and training for being, to learn to learn, to learn to exercise initiative, and to learn to coexist (Ruiz, 2007), which are aspects clearly related to soft skills.

As mentioned by Raciti (2015), training in higher education must have a clear intention of strengthening students' personal development, promoting their capacity to recognize and interact with the environment in a responsible, participatory, innovative, ethical, and socially meaningful manner. In this respect, comprehensive training implies the development of professional skills related to the learning of knowledge and techniques specific to a discipline, and learning new ways of behaving that encourage students' interest in transforming and improving social reality.

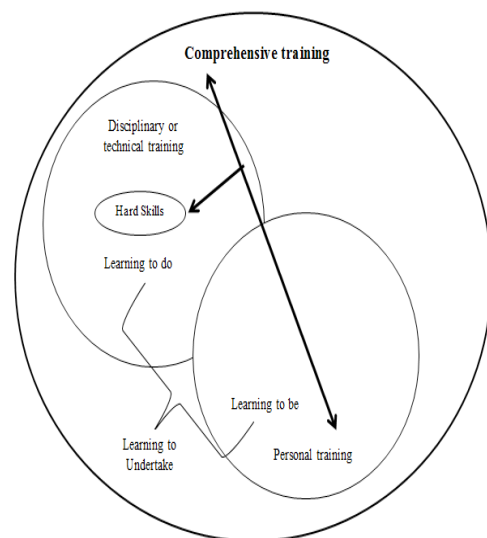


Figure 1. Elements of Comprehensive training. The circle with the largest diameter represents the set of comprehensive training consisting of disciplinary or technical training and personal training. Disciplinary or technical training requires the development of hard skills and is related to learning to do. Personal training is related to learning to be and transversal skills that have an impact on disciplinary or technical training.

Higher education that promotes comprehensive training must consider relationships in the university context as potential interactions of self-learning and modes of interaction with others (Rosa, Navarro-Segura, & López, 2014). This implies the educational action of training for the labor field removed from automatic, distant and passive training; that is to say, higher education must recognize the personal abilities and disciplinary competencies of the student as articulated and constantly evolving links (Zabalza, 2001).

Initiatives for evaluation and training in soft skills: A brief historical context

At global level, one of the studies on soft skills with the greatest impact so far, is the one conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank between 2008 and 2010 aimed at systematically observing soft skills in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil in order to establish the relationship between schooling and education for young people in the workplace (Bassi et al., 2012). Similarly, the University of Angus in Scotland implemented a project in 2011 to measure and evaluate soft skills, finding that skills such as leadership and context awareness are key to personal development, work, and employment (Kechagias, 2011).

Elsewhere, in Brazil, the Ayrton Senna Institute conducted a social and emotional or non-cognitive assessment in the state of Rio de Janeiro, aimed at measuring the social-emotional skills of fifth, tenth, and twelfth grade students. This was conducted in order to establish whether or not soft skills were related to academic success, finding a high level of association between these two variables (Santos & Primi, 2014). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development carried out an empirical work that identified the most relevant soft skills, how they can be developed, and in which contexts they can be taught (OECD, 2015). However, the most interesting work developed at the international level in the field of soft skills was presented by Groh, Krishnan, McKenzie, and Vishwanath (2016). The work was conducted in Jordan and presents a program to evaluate skills using group exercises, role-play evaluations, and interviews based on skills assessment.

Regarding the Colombian context, one of the few programs designed to evaluate the relationship between soft skills, education, and the labor market is the World Bank's STEP program, which has been replicated in several countries around the world, including Colombia. The program mainly evaluated decision-making, hostile intent perceived by others, risk taking, and time preferences (Valerio, Sanchez-Puerta, Pierre, Rajadel, & Taborda, 2014). There are other studies that have shown an interest in the development of general social-emotional skills, but not specifically in soft skills. For example, Ternera and De Biava (2009) identified social skill levels in psychology students entering a university on Colombia's Caribbean Coast, concluding that overall skill levels were low and needed strengthening. Preciado (2014) conducted research that sought to strengthen life skills specifically resilience, and Álvarez (2004) proposed a modification of the higher education curriculum in order to comply with the determinations of the Ministry of Education regarding professional training based on competencies, interdisciplinarity, and autonomous student work.

How to develop and potentiate soft skills in the context of higher education

From an educational perspective that recognizes the importance of soft skills, university education is conceived as something more than simple training for the labor field, where

professional development is directly related to personal development. Thus, as mentioned by Mangrulkar et al. (2001) to develop life skills, individuals must be significantly committed to personal development, making active learning pedagogy necessary; i.e., teaching skills require participatory methods such as role-playing, discussion, and situation analysis.

Thus, based on an analysis of the literature, we found that among the main strategies used to develop soft skills in the university context is the design of activities linked to the curriculum that allow practical application; for example, experiential activities that involve interaction and relationships with others (Lagos, 2012). It has also proposed to link the curriculum with reality, with problems that students would have to tackle on a daily basis, and with an experiential approach to the needs that they would encounter among the population (Ruiz, 2007).

Silva (2013) conducted an interview with the director of the Center for Educational Research and Development, María José Valdebenito at Universidad Alberto Hurtado, in which she pointed out that strategies to promote soft skills include workshops or group training programs aimed at promoting collaboration and teamwork as well as activities that promote communication between students such as games and artistic or recreational activities outside the traditional classroom space. She also stated that this is not often done in schools and that it is as yet necessary to clearly establish strategies and activities in the curricula specifically aimed at training in transversal skills.

Similarly, training in soft skills requires fieldwork with communities and families close to the educational environment that can benefit from the technical or disciplinary skills that the students develop. This allows them to generate a solid sense of identity, evidencing the need for teamwork in order to obtain better results in their daily work and personal activities. In this respect, it must be recognized that the proposal to involve other actors in the educational process for training in soft skills requires a transformation in the pedagogical paradigm. That is, what is required is a methodology different from the one implemented for the development of cognitive or professional competencies (Silva, 2013). When considering training in soft skills, this means thinking about the transformation of the classical model of higher education, bringing its actions closer to the education of humanity to serve humanity.

In this respect, professional practices are a scenario to which higher education must pay special attention (Piña, 2016) as students are expected to interact with peers, colleagues, superiors and clients. Furthermore, it is through this educational process, that students assume their professional and personal roles to tackle new challenges. All these environmental conditions characteristic of this educational space are expected to enable the development of transversal skills. This is why higher education institutions should be interested in evaluating the development of soft skills during pre-practical and post-practical vocational training, as this will make it possible to identify whether it is indeed education with "simulated" training that allows for the development of skills or whether, on the contrary, efforts should be focused on the professional internship period.

Another basic pillar of training in soft skills is interdisciplinary as it is believed that it is not the task of educators alone but the responsibility of psychologists, counselors, and other actors involved in the teaching and learning process. This leads us to consider that it is not only necessary to promote articulated work (Silva, 2013), but also, as pointed out by Ayala (2013), president of Microsoft's emerging markets department, within the framework of Virtual Education, the development of soft skills in teachers and other actors involved in students' teaching and learning processes is fundamental, emphasizing that contents are only tools and that they are not the most important thing in this new digital era. Now, what we most require are the skills to question, create knowledge networks, and observe.

In sum, the review of practical aspects leads us to think of the need to replace passive or traditional pedagogy, limited to the transmission of knowledge, by an active pedagogy that promotes multidisciplinary work in higher education centers and trains integral teachers to educate integral students.

Conclusions

To conclude, the panoramic review of soft skills allowed us to establish three key aspects. The first, that a clear conceptualization of the term and of each of the skills that are part of the whole is necessary. The second is the need to recognize and appropriate theories that consider feasible the training of soft skills in university contexts and the adoption of conceptually solid theoretical models such as the theory of social learning that methodologically guide and direct the training process. The third is that although there is a recognition of the impact of experiential activities in training, there is still a need for research in the practical area that allows more specific and concrete orientations on the pedagogical activities and strategies that allow their development.

It is also important to recognize that through research it is evident that training in soft skills is highly relevant socially, because it recognizes the considerable demands made by the globalized and rapidly changing world that professionals have to tackle and where it has been clearly identified that professional competencies are no guarantee of success if they are not accompanied by personal and critical skills that allow them to make a more comprehensive reading of the world that is attuned to reality. Thus, in response to social demands, today's higher education institutions should stop considering universities as places where students go to theorize about the net knowledge of a discipline, but rather, they should look to turning the educational scenario into a space to learn to live with others, that implies learning to socialize, interact, understand and accept differences, argue critically and recognize and interpret emotions.

In short, the need for training in soft skills in the university context requires the necessary pedagogical adjustments in both curricular components and professional practices in order to train people with the skills for "doing" as well as with the skills necessary for "being". So the challenge here is to

focus interest on what is really important about what we call "University". That is, the human beings who are educated within an educational community that models, molds, and creates not only professionals, but also leaders, empowered women, discerning individuals, and responsible citizens (Rodríguez, 2014).

This pedagogical shift, besides being a response to real comprehensive training, dynamizes a positive impact on the community and society (Shek, Leung, & Merrick, 2017; Duque, 2016), training highly productive professionals, who are propositive, innovative, emotionally intelligent, resilient to adversity and managers of new projects. Training in soft skills makes for social agents with the capacity to quickly adapt to change, who are able to self-evaluate, lead, and generate real social transformations.

Promoting soft skills in university students is a win-win situation. The student benefits from personal training; the educational institution benefits from providing real comprehensive training, thus complying with basic institutional principles; the community benefits because it is served by professionals in training while, at the same time, students increase their transversal skills. In sum, investing in students' integral training is an investment that can be perceived and where there is no loss. This is why the text emphasizes the promotion of a higher education scenario interested in the development of soft skills and comprehensive training, leading to the parallel development of students' being and doing skills, which in turn, leads to happier and more complete human beings (Valdebenito, 2013, quoted by Silva, 2013).

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