

RESEARCH

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# **EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION: A CLOSER VIEW**

### INTELIGENCIA EMOCIONAL Y EDUCACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN

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### **ABSTRACT:**

We seek to stablish the importance and attention that is being paid today to emotional education in high educational institutions: it's worth for life and the student's formation, for their personal and professional success. Also the effort that has been made in the educational institutions to empower these set of competences. In the same way we are interested in the perception of social abilities that is reaching the academic and professional social agents. Aside all of this, we'll determine the origin of emotional intelligence as a concept and the evolution of the academic concept of intelligence, from the times in which it was determined by the mastering of academic subjects, to those characterized by IC and emotional intelligence tests. This way, we could be able to see what has been the criteria employed for the measurement of human intellect and compare them, so we can ask ourselves effectively about the degree of our own, today's ideas in the subject. Having a clearer idea about the global and historical evolutions in this field, we'll have a better position from which to judge the quality and quantity of work aimed to the measurement of both de Intellectual Capacity and the interaction abilities.

**KEY WORDS:** Emotional intelligence – university - communication models – emotion management – MEIS - academic Performance - social skills.

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# RESUMEN

Se busca establecer la importancia y atención que se presta actualmente a la educación emocional en las instituciones superiores: su valor para la vida y formación de los alumnos y para su éxito personal y profesional, así como el esfuerzo que se ha estado haciendo en las instituciones educativas para potenciar este juego de competencias. Igualmente nos interesa la percepción de las habilidades sociales de estos por parte de los agentes académicos y laborales. Antes de todo ello, determinaremos el origen de la inteligencia emocional como concepto y la evolución de la percepción académica de inteligencia, desde los tiempos en que lo determinaba el dominio de materias académicas, hasta los test de CI y la inteligencia emocional. De esta manera podremos comprobar cuáles han sido los criterios empleados para medir el intelecto humano y compararlos entre sí para poder preguntarnos de manera efectiva por el grado de validez de nuestras propias ideas actuales en la materia. Al tener una idea más clara de los esfuerzos que global e históricamente se han hecho en este campo, tendremos una mejor posición desde la cual juzgar la calidad y cantidad de esfuerzo destinado tanto a la medición de la capacidad intelectual como de la capacidad de interacción

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Inteligencia emocional – universidad - modelos de comunicación - gestión de emociones – MEIS - rendimiento académico - habilidades sociales.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Reflection and communication - understood as efficient communication that generates positive responses - are two activities intrinsically linked by the need to give way to messages that bear the burden of subjectivity of each individual. The nature and strength of the feelings involved, the clarity of the reasoning set forth, and the communicative abilities of the sender and the receiver come into play, both in combination and non-regulated.

When the cognitive concept is linked to the emotive one, authors such as Redó (2010) focus their studies on combining physiology and thought:

The neurobiologist Damasio (2001), whose studies on the brain confirm that the limbic system and the cortex influence each other, explains how emotion influences cognition, and especially memory. We remember certain experiential episodes but we forget others. When talking about memory, it is necessary to emphasize that it is not only related to the fact of retaining certain information

but that memory is part of almost all cognitive processes: perception, decision making, learning, planning, priority setting, creativity, etc. The influence of emotion on cognition has therefore a broad impact. Along the same lines, LeDoux (1999) has shown that it is possible to study emotion in the way that reason has been studied; that is, by analyzing how the brain processes stimuli. When it comes to emotional stimuli, an emotional response occurs. His research has led him to the conviction that emotion comes to control thought. He argues it by considering that emotion is stronger than reason. That is, reason may come to control reflection, and it is very difficult for rational thought to control emotion. Therefore, in cases of anxiety or depression, reason can reflect on what is happening and may want to say enough, but it almost never achieve it, because anxiety necessarily happens eliminating stress or through emotional management. On the other hand, Maturana (2001) from the biological point of view, has defined emotions as the "dynamic corporal dispositions that define the different domains of action in which we move". Hence, when one changes emotion, one changes the domain of action. That is, if our emotional circumstances change, so does our way of thinking. (Redó, 2010, p.79)

From works like this, it is clear that human performance and communication cannot be separated in a stagnant way in actions exclusively moved by reason or emotion, although there are actions exclusively motivated by emotions, with very little intervention of rationality. Both are components, in one or another proportion, of all our initiatives (Sánchez Leyva, 2015) (Antón Hurtado, 2015).

Following Maturana (1993), we agree that the same oral language is also loaded with a strong emotional component proper to body language. This leads to body communication resulting in a much more universal language: the language of emotions transcends the rational one, it comes across cultural barriers - not without difficulties - and brings added value to those prepared to understand it beyond its essential rudiments.

All of the above is endorsed by authors such as Gergen (1996) when he affirms that social communication is based on verbal interaction, as a main means of transmitting emotions and feelings, both positive and negative, true or false. To him, language is generative because it is capable of describing realities and, therefore, of creating them. That is, it is possible to state events, but also to make them happen through language.

Language has, as we have seen, consequences in reality, beginning with the emotional environment generated around discourses; and we learn, since an early age, the ability to use this generating capacity: we learn to manage emotions through language. It gives them form and makes them comprehensible to the intellect, allowing us to verbalize and rationalize to some extent that part of ourselves and of others.

This capacity for communicative action through orality is essentially social intelligence of relationships. According to Bruner (1998), such intelligence has the basic ability to construct beliefs even on the beliefs of others or to attribute them to

concepts or individuals to differentiate them from those created domestically. This would be the most characteristic feature of Humanity, the ability to reread and constantly reinterpret our intellectual capacity and our ideas.

It is from here that the process of socialization and cooperation from which the cognitive activity derives emanates in its entirety. The systemic approach, Bronfenbrenner (1986), lays the foundation for characterizing relations among human beings as relations among open systems (other people, but also families, groups of friends, work centers and studies, etc.). For its part, the written language differs from the oral one in that it entails an abstraction representative of thought, and it alludes to different communicative moments, the reason why it lacks the context of the situation. We ourselves are forced to create the context: to create it through language and its influence in thought. The use of the written word implies a more independent, willful and free attitude towards it.

Thus, Vygotsky classifies them as tools and signs; the former would be concrete instruments facilitating external relations with nature, -fountain pen, ballpoint pen, or word-processor; signs are instruments at the psychological level, of an inner nature, conformed by the system written in itself, by the concrete code understood as language, by the alphabet, etc. Writing is more complex than oral communication because it cannot be given in a subconscious or thoughtless way.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

We seek to determine the importance given and the attention paid to emotional education in institutions of higher education: its value for the vital and formative development of students, as well as for the development of their expectations of growth in the labor and human field. All this incardinated within the referential framework on the effort that has been made in the educational institutions to create a simple but effective set of competences among the students. We also delve into the perception of their social skills in the business and university spheres.

In particular, in this article we will focus on the models of interpersonal communication that exist in today's teaching, so that we can analyze the imprint of emotional intelligence to ponder its importance in teaching.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This article starts from a knowledge necessity initially supported by an exhaustive analysis of sources, or hermeneutics, to determine the current status quo of training in emotional intelligence. On this basis, we apply an inductive-deductive process, based both on the cited studies of sources and on current cases taken as the basis of the new theories.

The current studies focus on the analysis of emotional intelligence (object of study) as a means (vehicle) to transmit other humanistic knowledge proper to a scientific publication in the area of Humanities.

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Our work will be to discern which of these pieces of knowledge is appropriate to be applied in the field of higher education. With the new implementation of EHEA (or Plan Bologna), curricular contents have changed towards technology as both tool and object of study (the famous ICTs), but leaving aside the emotional competencies of learning.

In order not to neglect any of the aspects of the communicative process, we will focus our method on a content analysis of the main studies developed in the last years that are already configured as classic models of the interpersonal communicative phenomenon and emotional intelligence .

The methodology we used is based on analyzing where they succeed and where these aspects fail to implement a new learning system that is intended to be collaborative (that is, that requires the application of emotional intelligence) but which may contain some key elements for Its correct development, which conforms our hypothesis of work.

### 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Models of communication in teaching

The mutual influence between communication and interpersonal relationship raises the need to delve into the knowledge of each person's style of communication. Subconsciously, we all have diverse communicative models inside ourselves. Context and emotional intelligence determine which of them will have preeminence at a given communicative moment. The individuality of each leads to resort to one model or another, these being broadly, following the model established by Redó (2010).

- Dominant model
- Submissive model
- Cooperating model

These models do not appear "in a pure state": the answers are a mixture of the three styles, in which one of them is preponderant. The exact composition of the response is structured in an organic manner to the specific situation being addressed, the people involved, the relationship with and among them, etc. Although it may seem otherwise, the "cooperative" style is usually less preponderant; although many university graduates claim to be proficient in teamwork - from which it would be inferred otherwise - this capacity is not perceived by employers within the same reference group (Barraycoa and Lasaga, 2009 and 2010). Another negative indicator in this sense would be the lack of interest shown by Management in the teaching of humanities subjects, such as philosophy or ethics, which could be important in this sense (Del Campo Lozano, 2012). The complexity inherent in interpersonal communications makes, in fact, mutual satisfaction of the needs of two parties rarely easy. This is, in no small measure, because there is no collective preparation for it: since childhood, and increasingly, we receive educational messages of a competitive nature. The prevailing immediacy in communications also impels us to seek immediate, little-meditated and even standardized communication solutions, however unsuccessful they may be from the rational point of view, always according to Lozano.

This leads us to raise the potential of communication as an educational matter in not academic but human training. In this sense, it is crucial to strengthen the little-exploited cooperative model of communication since the first steps of academic education, which is therefore social, and the apprehension of language, so that each individual has more developed tools to give the best of himself and receive it from others in his social relationships. This would require a conscious effort in the school environment in particular, and in the educational process in general. In fact, students understand from an early age that they are surrounded by equals, and that the same way as them, those equals have feelings, beliefs, sufferings and opinions of their own. From this starting point, it is feasible to exemplify to students, by their teachers, a cooperative model of intelligent communication.

### 4.2. Emotional intelligence

We work around a concept that has re-defined the very idea of intelligence: since its original conception of the classical school, in which intelligence was defined by the mastery of a series of subjects (mathematics, Greek, Latin, physics, etc.) to the most current one, based on a mixture of academic achievement and Intellectual quotient score. This idea has become obsolete to some authors, who are of the opinion that traditional academic intelligence is not enough to achieve professional success, since the most prestigious professionals are so because of their ability to recognize and manage their own and others' emotions more effectively. For the same reason, they consider that intelligence understood as gross intellectual quotient does not necessarily translate into vital success, nor does it indicate the mental or emotional balance of the person. (Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera, 2003)

It arises in the first instance, how to measure this type of intelligence reliably. There are three main groups of methods, according to Suberviola-Ovejas (2012):

- Questionnaires, scales and self-reports:

This method is very commonly used. Among the best known are Trait, Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) by Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey and Palfai (1995) and TMMS-24 (abridged Spanish version, Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera and Ramos, 1999). In all of them, an individual approach is sought on the reflective aspects of the emotional fact.

- External observers:

Part of the budget is that, if EI involves the ability to manage and understand our own emotions and those of the people around us, why not ask people close to us about how we handle our emotions in public and how we face the problems and events that happen to us? (Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal, 2004).

- Emotional or skill tasks:

It seeks to eliminate the partiality to which other methods are susceptible. Also dodging the adulterated responses based on the need to give a positive image to the detriment of a precise image. In this sense, Alarcón García and Guirao Miron (2014) conclude:

As regards the competences of the EHEA, it is not easy to give a single definition of competence, due to the multidimensional nature of the concept that groups attitudinal, behavioral, conceptual and social elements (Colás 2005). However, it must be said that most authors agree that competence is not only know-how, but that "knowledge" and "know-how" converge, since it is not merely instrumental, it is necessary to understand and internalize why and what for (Delors, 1996; Colás, 2005; ANECA, 2005 Zabala and Arrnau, 2008). Competences fundamentally enable the person who develops them to be able to exercise an activity or profession. In this sense, the model of university competence runs the risk of focusing university learning on training products, professional competencies and the labor market, to the detriment of the development of other more social, emotional, civic or moral competencies. We believe that the concept of competence must be inseparable from the integral development of the person in the line of the theory of the approach of capacities, in which emotions have a precise place.

An individual endowed with broadly developed emotional competencies is what we would call empathic: he is aware of his own and others' emotions through communication: he understands them and knows how to act before them, thereby gaining the ability to manage them in the best possible way.

Numerous studies focus on the proven relationship between Emotional Intelligence and social development: a greater ability to recognize facial and nonverbal emotional expressions, greater perception of social acceptance and more satisfaction with the establishment of relationships within the environment (Ciarrochi; Chan & Caputi, 2000). A high score in Emotional Intelligence obtained with MEIS is linked to a higher level of empathy (Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, 1999). And finally, Extremera and Berrocal (2004) propose that a better set of emotional aptitudes translates into a greater percentage of successful social interactions, resulting in higher levels of personal well-being in the positive sense.

### **4.3. Importance in academic performance**

Following Palomera, Fernández-Berrocal and Brackett (2008):

Emotions and skills related to their management affect learning processes, mental and physical health, quality of social relationships, and academic and work performance (Brackett and Caruso, 2007). Teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions, mainly because it involves daily work based on social interactions in which the teacher must make a great effort to regulate not only his own emotions but also those of students, parents, coworkers, etc. (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Teachers, unfortunately, experience more negative emotions than positive ones (Emmer, 1994). Negative emotions, such as anxiety, interfere with our cognitive ability to process information (Eysenck and Calvo, 1992), while positive emotions increase our creative capacity to generate new ideas and, therefore, our ability to cope with difficulties (Frederickson, 2001). The positive emotions of teachers can increase teachers' well-being and also the adjustment of their students (Birch and Ladd, 1996). This positive effect can also form a spiral which in turn facilitates a more favorable class climate for learning (Sutton and Whealey, 2003). That is why the ability to identify, understand and regulate emotions, both positive and negative, becomes essential in this profession, to be able to use and generate the emotions in our favor.

The importance of Emotional Intelligence in the educational field, and especially that which is a strong factor in the academic success and integration of students in society outside the University, is the most valued at the moment in the study of curricular subjects (Extremera and Berrocal, 2004). Even though the relevance and preference of understanding over memorization is now clear, it is necessary to go beyond it and expand the emotional competences of students, due to the impact they have both educationally and socially. Most studies point to the relationship among Emotional Intelligence, Social Competence and Academic Success. (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2006). However, and as a data, the conclusions of Ortiz Sobrino & Rodríguez Barba (2011) indicate that the offer of training in Emotional Intelligence is not part of the referents of students when choosing a career or higher education institution. Emotional skills could contribute to academic and social adaptation in several ways: for example, as promoters of the mental process, since cognitive work involves using and managing emotions in favor of concentration, pressure control and, in general, an increase in the motivation of the student to carry out his studies and all the activities that relate to them (Maestre, 2006). Emotional Intelligence may also influence academic performance, making emotionally competent students stand out in certain subjects, such as literature or plastic subjects (Petrides, Frederickson & Furnhan, 2004). Even team management relies heavily on mastery of this type of intelligence (Fainstein, 1997).

In short, there is sufficient evidence of the importance of the emotional state and management in students' performance, as well as the direct role of Emotional Intelligence in performance and well-being in the academic and social environment. (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2003) (Jiménez, 2009).

### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Any effort to promote emotional intelligence in university classrooms is ultimately futile if it is not perceived as fundamental by companies and agents who demand this set of skills as part of their curricular requirements in hiring new graduates beyond their *ad hoc* skills and abilities.

These efforts also collide with a changing business culture and the counterculture of the competition on cooperation, which promotes models of interpersonal communication other than the cooperative one, already underused. The studies speak unambiguously of the advantage that an adequate set of empathic abilities grants to a worker or student over another. And yet, current educational models do not include these socializing expectations. Undoubtedly, we are talking about capacities difficult to acquire in an unplanned way, and any approach that intends to teach them exclusively in the higher institutions - forgetting the primary ones - is not realistic. A complete emotional education goes through a reasoned and reasonable change of the educational system from the very base of the system, in order to

implement a cooperative relationship model, so that it is possible to have a greater number of teachers trained to apply it properly. This new model would be applied both in the long term and in the short term, since it implies an additional effort by the teachers in charge of managing this model - given its greater complexity compared to the current system - which should necessarily imply, from a social point of view, a revision of values on a new social model.

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