Social skills in primary education: Influential variables in intercultural contexts

Eva Maria Aranda Vega[1] (ID)
Maria Tome Fernandez[2] (ID)
Jose Manuel Ortiz Marcos[3] (ID)

(Corresponding Author)

[1]*Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Education of the University of Granada, Spain.*
Email: aranda47@correo.ugr.es
[2]*Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Education and Sports Sciences, University of Granada, Melilla, Spain.*
Email: mariatf@ugr.es
[3]*Department of Didactics and School Organization, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Granada, Granada, Spain.*
Email: jm.ortiz.marcos@ugr.es

Abstract

This study examined the most common social skills among elementary school students in an intercultural environment with contextual diversity, taking age, gender and place of birth into consideration. A total of 803 students (aged 6 to 12) were assessed using the previously validated "social skills questionnaire for intercultural students in primary education". Data were analyzed by descriptive and comparative statistics using the most recent version of SPSS software taking into account sociodemographic variables about social skills. The results indicate that gender exhibits different levels of social skills. Specifically, boys present higher scores than girls to reject and end interactions as well as in the ability to make suggestions to others. Students' social skill development is influenced by their nationality since social interaction within a community and the development of specific social skills are determined by the traditions and customs of every country. It is necessary to consider the diverse profiles of students as priority targets for educational interventions aimed at fostering these types of skills which will contribute to social integration in diverse contexts. The practical implications of this study suggest that educational programs should be adapted to address gender and nationality differences in the development of social skills. Better social and cultural integration in diverse school environments help students interact effectively and develop essential social competencies in a globalized world.

Keywords: Age, Elementary school students, Gender, Intercultural contexts, Place of birth, Social skills.

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature
This study is distinguished by being the first to employ the "social skills questionnaire for intercultural students in elementary education" providing a detailed and specific assessment of the impact of cultural diversity on students' social skills and providing a unique perspective on integration in diverse educational settings.

1. Introduction

This study examined the most common social skills among elementary school students in an intercultural environment with contextual diversity, taking age, gender and place of birth into consideration. For this purpose, it has focused on students aged 6 to 12 coming from schools in all Andalusian provinces. Globalization is considered a phenomenon that enriches society culturally as long as respect and tolerance towards diversity are encouraged (Lefringhausen, Ferenczi, Marshall, & Kunst, 2021). However, it is necessary to investigate this phenomenon in-depth to understand how this process affects different cultures and maximize its benefits while minimizing negative impacts. The choice of geographical context allows us to obtain a diverse and representative sample that reflects the interculturality present in the region. The importance of social skills in promoting harmonious coexistence and inclusive and integrative education is recognized. These skills are fundamental to promote respect, empathy and effective communication between individuals from different cultures (García, 2021). Therefore, understanding the variables that influence the social skills of elementary school students in an intercultural environment is crucial to develop effective educational and social strategies. Research on social skills in an intercultural context will provide valuable information to design educational intervention programs that promote the comprehensive development of students and foster positive coexistence among people from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, it will contribute to a better understanding of the adaptation and socialization processes of children in diverse environments. Therefore, the following research question arises: What are the variables that influence the social skills of elementary school students in an intercultural environment?

2. Literature Review

Globalization has established intercultural environments that represent a significant cultural richness, respect and tolerance for diversity (Passiatore et al., 2019). In this sense, social skills play a crucial role as they are indispensable skills to interact with and relate to others in a peaceful and tolerant manner (Walsh, Holloway, Lydon, McGrath, & Cunningham, 2019). Their adequate development counteracts individualism and fosters emotional competencies (Muzzio & Strasser, 2022).

Students' ability to adapt to diverse social situations will depend on their ability to employ social competencies and behaviors that enable them to meet demands and tasks effectively (Bagea, Ausat, Kurniawan, Kraugusteeliana, & Azzaakiyyah, 2023). Combining practical skills, knowledge, drive, moral principles, attitudes, feelings and other social and behavioral elements that work together to produce effective action contributes to social skills' competencies (Kalkusch et al., 2022). This action will determine positive interactions between peers such as initiative, problem solving or maintaining conversations (Soininen, Pakarinen, & Lerkkanen, 2023). Therefore, if students possess developed social competencies, they will enjoy an inclusive and integrative education which is crucial in diverse educational contexts (Caqueo-Urízar et al., 2021) such as the object of this research. Educational institutions should foster harmonious cultural coexistence, recognizing the multiple difficulties faced by diverse students (Schaefer & Simon, 2020) especially at the elementary education stage where the main social challenges arise (Crewdson et al., 2023). At this stage, when most new social relationships are established, personal well-being and self-esteem are promoted in students (Caballo et al., 2018). Therefore, in this research, the construct of social skills is conceived as the basis that will allow elementary students to express their opinions or thoughts, relate appropriately and accept criticism assertively (Guo et al., 2023).

2.1. An Analysis of Social Skills Based on the Age of the Students

According to Crewdson et al. (2022), social skills are acquired through learning. The school is the ideal environment for developing these skills since it is during this time (between the ages of six and nine) that children start to become conscious of themselves and their peers. In this regard, Kalkusch et al. (2022) obtained in their study positive relationships between students of these ages and the assimilation of social skills oriented to oneself and others such as cooperation, assertiveness, affective perspective-taking and social activity. On the other hand, Guo et al. (2023) observed that when students get older between the ages of 10 and 12, the process of learning social skills becomes more difficult because of the physical and psychological changes they undergo. These changes involve role changes in how they view the world and themselves (Tacca Huamán, Cuarez Cordero, & Quispe Huaycho, 2020). In such a way, it is the students who have a high level of interpersonal understanding and positive communication skills towards their peers who have the greatest influence on the rest (Sheridan et al., 2022) and a higher social skills (Sparapani et al., 2019).

2.2. Variability in Social Skills as a Function of Student Nationality

According to Fernández-Leyva, Tomé-Fernández, and Ortiz-Marcos (2021), another variable that has an impact on the development of social skills in students from intercultural contexts is place of birth. It is observed that students of African and Asian origin face challenges in the acquisition and development of these skills in Spain due to their lack of familiarity with the educational system and language (Llorent, Zych, Fontans, & Álamo, 2021; Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Solera, & Calmaestra, 2018). In addition, the work priorities of parents and the limited family time available hinder the consolidation and acceptance of certain social skills promoted in Spanish schools (Tomé-Fernández, Fernández-Leyva, & Olmedo-Moreno, 2020). Therefore, the implementation of social supports to favor the social and educational integration of these groups in Spanish educational institutions through extracurricular activities and collaborative projects is justified (Castro, 2021; Esparza & Sánchez, 2017). It is imperative that educational centers ensure the inclusion of all students regardless of their ethnic, cultural or religious background

(Walsh et al., 2019). According to Martín (2017), students belonging to cultural minorities adapt their coping strategies when interacting with the dominant group which may result in the development of disruptive behaviors. Therefore, it is essential that students develop social skills to cope with these situations (Bobowik, Wlodarczyk, & Lay-Lisboa, 2017).

2.3. Social Skills According to Students' Gender

Gender is another significant variable in the development of social skills in the early stages. Various research indicates that girls tend to possess greater social skill development compared to the male gender. Several scientific studies (King, Law, Hurley, Petrenchik, & Schwellnus, 2010; Maleki, Mardani, Mitra Chehrzad, Dianatinasab, & Vaismoradi, 2019; Spruijt, Dekker, Ziermans, & Swaab, 2019) highlight that girls exhibit higher levels of interpersonal functioning and show greater concern for the quality of their interpersonal relationships. However, Salavera, Usán, and Jarie (2020) point out that there is evidence that male students present lower competence in social skills and higher levels of anxiety in social situations among the peer group. However, these findings can be modified in intercultural contexts especially in the case of girls from discriminatory or patriarchal cultural environments where overprotective families can both support and restrict social relationships in the new host context (Lleixà & Nieva, 2018).

In general, there is consensus in the scientific community on the importance of the elementary education period for the learning and practice of social skills. Research such as Crewdson et al. (2023) and Jõgi, Pakarinen, Tolvanen, and Lerkkanen (2022) supports this claim. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the main social skills of students at this stage paying special attention to sociodemographic variables such as age, place of birth and gender. The analysis of these variables in cross-cultural contexts may provide valuable information for the advancement of the study.

3. Methodology

The following objective is established to address the question: "What are the variables that influence the social skills of elementary school students in an intercultural environment? According to the evaluation of the scientific literature, age, gender and place of birth are taken into account when diagnosing the social skills of elementary school students in multicultural contexts. This review emphasizes the relevance of the present study and establishes the basis for the proposed hypothesis. It is expected that native or autochthonous male elementary school students aged 10-12 demonstrate greater development of social skills in intercultural educational settings. A quasi-experimental design involving non-probabilistic purposive sampling has been implemented to achieve this objective.

3.1. Participants

The sample that participated in this study was 803 students from different elementary schools characterized by intercultural environments. These students ranged in age from 6 to 12 ($\bar{x}$ = 9.65, SD=1.365) and came from educational centers located in different provinces of Andalusia such as Seville, Cadiz, Cordoba, Huelva, Almeria, Granada, Malaga and Jaen. Of the total number of participants, 40.3% were female and 59.4% were male. In terms of origin, 90.5% of the students are natives of Spain while 9.5% are immigrants from various countries such as Italy, Russia, Morocco, Asia, Argentina, Algeria, London and Nicaragua (see Table 1). The geographical distribution of students according to continents is as follows: 92.6% are in Europe, 3% in America, 3.6% in Africa and 0.8% in Asia (see Table 2).

Table 1. Places of birth of the students analyzed.

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage
Spain	727	90.5
Morocco	21	2.6
Argentina	16	2
Algeria	8	1
London	16	2
Nicaragua	8	1
Italy	1	0.1
Russia	6	0.8
Total	803	100

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda, Ortiz-Marcos, & Tomé-Fernández, 2023).

Table 2. Continents of origin of the students analyzed.

Continents	Frequency	Percentage
Europe	744	92.6
America	24	3
Africa	29	3.6
Asia	6	0.8
Total	803	100

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

3.2. Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data in this study was the "social skills questionnaire for intercultural students in primary education" (Aranda et al., 2023). This instrument has been previously validated through comparisons with other related instruments such as the social skills learning team questionnaire (CHSEA) (Mendo-Lázaro, León-del-Barco, Felipe-Castaño, Polo-del-Río, and Iglesias-Gallego 2018), the social skills questionnaire (CHASO-III) Salavera et al. (2017)), the social skills inventory (Oldmeadow, Quinn, & Kowert,

2013), the social skills questionnaire for college students (SSQ-U) Morán, Olaz, and Del Prette (2015) , the social skills for immigrant youth (Tomé-Fernández, García-Garnica, Martínez-Martínez, & Olmedo-Moreno, 2020) and the social skills improvement system (RS) (Bunford, Evans, Becker, & Langberg, 2015). This instrument consists of two parts: the first part focuses on collecting sociodemographic information including questions on age, sex, religion, ethnicity, race, city, place of birth, school, grade and time spent in Spain. The second part consists of a Likert-type scale consisting of 33 items grouped into five dimensions.

It should be noted that this scale presents excellent psychometric criteria for validity and reliability. The internal consistency of each of the dimensions is presented below: "saying no and cutting interactions" (α=0.613), "making suggestions to others" (α=0.663), "expression of emotions" (α=0.638), "expression of opinions" (α=0.638) and "relationship with peer group" (α=0.668). Finally, according to the indicators established by Laurencelle (2021), the instrument shows a total reliability of α=0.65 which is considered acceptable for the diagnosis of social skills of elementary school students in culturally diverse contexts since its value is close to the ideal value of 1.0. On the other hand, the confirmatory factor analysis revealing this instrument presents an optimal model fit in which the scale shows a comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) with good internal consistency of the latent factors ($\chi 2$ = 1185.745, p = 0.06, CFI = 0.77, TLI = 0.74 and RMSEA = 0.04) (Salavera et al., 2020).

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The diagnosis of social skills in elementary school students in intercultural contexts was carried out using a validated questionnaire (Aranda et al., 2023) that was administered individually to students from participating schools. Consent was previously obtained from the principals of each institution and the parents or legal guardians of the minors. The questionnaire was administered in the classrooms in the presence of teachers and took approximately 12 to 20 minutes to complete.

3.4. Data Analysis

The SPSS version 25 statistical program was used for data tabulation and analysis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used for data analysis in compliance with theoretical recommendations with a sample size of more than fifty participants. This test which is based on the Z statistic to evaluate the distribution between two or more variables revealed a result of p = 0.00 (see Table 3). This evidence led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) indicating a non-normal distribution of the data and therefore justifying the use of non-parametric test statistics (see Table 3).

Table 3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Dimensions	Statistic	Gl	Sig.
Saying "no" and cutting off interactions	0.081	802	0.000
Making suggestions to others	0.148	802	0.000
Expressing emotions	0.101	802	0.000
Expressing opinions	0.098	802	0.000
Relationship with a peer group	0.142	802	0.000

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

4. Results

The hypothesis of this study explores the relationship between gender, place of birth and age with the various dimensions of the questionnaire. The Mann-Whitney U test was applied to two independent groups and a non-parametric distribution to investigate the presence of significant differences in the students' social skills according to gender (Aslam & Aldosari, 2020) (see Table 4). This test revealed the existence of significant differences in the dimensions "saying no and cutting off interactions" (p=0.045) and "making suggestions to third parties" (p=0.049) given that the values obtained were less than 0.05 as determined by the statistic.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test of the questionnaire dimensions according to gender.

Dimension	U de Mann-Whitney	W de Wilcoxon	Z	Sig.
Saying "no" and cutting off interactions	71162.000	123812.000	–2.001	0.045
Making suggestions to others	71306.000	123956.000	–1.971	0.049
Expressing emotions	77064.500	129714.500	–0.166	0.868
Expressing opinions	75899.500	190380.500	–0.479	0.632
Relationship with a peer group	76389.000	191349.000	–0.378	0.705

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

The following table of means is presented with the intention of describing the significant differences found. It is evident that the arithmetic means of male students are higher in the dimensions "saying no and cutting off interactions" and "making suggestions to third parties" in all items except in item 21 where the mean value is slightly higher in female students. However, this difference is not significant when making an overall assessment of gender disparity (see Table 5).

Table 5. Average acquisition of social skills according to gender in the dimensions "saying no and cutting off interactions" and "making suggestions to others".

Dimension: saying no and cutting off interactions	Boys	Girls	Dimension making suggestions to others	Boys	Girls
Item 18: If a salesperson insists on showing me a product I don't want, I have a hard time telling him "I don't want it".	$\bar{x} = 1.85$	$\bar{x} = 1.66$	Item 2: I find it difficult to ask a friend to play with me.	$\bar{x} = 1.42$	$\bar{x} = 1.36$
Item 19: When I am in a hurry and a friend calls me on the phone, I have a hard time hanging up.	$\bar{x} = 1.93$	$\bar{x} = 1.81$	Item 6: I prefer to ask my mother or father to call my friend on the phone to talk to him or her over there rather than talk in person.	$\bar{x} = 1.49$	$\bar{x} = 1.41$
Item 20: When I am asked to borrow my things, I lend them even if I don't want to or don't like it. I don't know how to say "no".	$\bar{x} = 1.95$	$\bar{x} = 1.80$	Item 8: I find it hard to talk when I am with my group of friends.	$\bar{x} = 1.52$	$\bar{x} = 1.46$
Item 21: I don't know how to tell a friend who talks a lot to shut up.	$\bar{x} = 1.95$	$\bar{x} = 2.01$	Item 9: If I buy something and see that it is not right, I am embarrassed to return it.	$\bar{x} = 1.79$	$\bar{x} = 1.73$
Item 22: When I decide that I don't feel like meeting a friend, I have a hard time telling them.	$\bar{x} = 1.94$	$\bar{x} = 1.82$	Item 33: I am unable to tell a friend that I like him or her very much.	$\bar{x} = 1.57$	$\bar{x} = 1.53$
Item 23: When a friend tells me he or she wants to play with me, I don't know how to say "no" if I don't feel like it.	$\bar{x} = 1.99$	$\bar{x} = 1.81$			
Item 24: I find it difficult to ask for the return of something I lent.	$\bar{x} = 1.61$	$\bar{x} = 1.57$			
Item 25: If a restaurant does not bring me the food as I ordered it, I find it difficult to ask for it to be made again.	$\bar{x} = 1.84$	$\bar{x} = 1.81$			

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis statistic was performed for several independent groups to determine significant differences in social skills according to place of birth (Johnson, 2022) (Table 6). This test revealed significant differences in the ability to "make suggestions to others". A descriptive statistical analysis of the means of the items corresponding to this dimension was performed to corroborate these differences. Considerable differences were observed in all the items in this dimension between the nationalities of the students (see Table 7).

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis statistic of the questionnaire dimensions according to place of birth.

Dimensions	Saying "no" and cutting interactions	Making suggestions to others	Expressing emotions	Expressing opinions	Relating to the peer group
Kruskal-Wallis test	8.290	12.899	6.901	3.891	8.995
Gl	6	6	6	6	6
Asymptotic sig.	0.218	0.045	0.330	0.691	0.174

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

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Table 7. Average acquisition of social skills according to place of birth in the dimension "making suggestions to others".

Dimension: Making suggestions to third parties	Spain	Morocco	Argentina	Algeria	London	Nicaragua	Italy	Russia
Items 2: I have a hard time asking a friend to play with me.	x̄=1.39	x̄=1.24	x̄=2	x̄=1	x̄=2	x̄=1.38	x̄=2.00	x̄=1
Items 6: I prefer to ask my mother or father to call my friend on the phone to talk to him or her over there.	x̄=1.46	x̄=1.38	x̄=1.50	x̄=1.50	x̄=1	x̄=1.13	x̄=1.00	x̄=1.33
Items 7: I feel bad when someone tells me I'm handsome.	x̄=1.35	x̄=1.43	x̄=1	x̄=2.50	x̄=2.50	x̄=1.50	x̄=3.00	x̄=1.33
Item 8: I find it hard to talk when I am with my group of friends.	x̄=1.48	x̄=1.43	x̄=1	x̄=1.50	x̄=4.50	x̄=1.75	x̄=3.00	x̄=1.33
Item 9: If I buy something and see that it's not right, I'm embarrassed to return it.	x̄=1.76	x̄=1.67	x̄=1.50	x̄=2	x̄=5	x̄=1.38	x̄=3.00	x̄=1.67
Item 33: I am incapable of telling a friend that I like him or her.	x̄=1.54	x̄=1.90	x̄=1	x̄=2.50	x̄=1.50	x̄=1.13	x̄=1.00	x̄=1.33

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

Finally, the Mann Whitney U test was performed (see Table 8) to examine the significant differences in the social skills acquired by the students as a function of their ages. In this analysis, the subjects were grouped into two categories: ages 6 to 9 and 10 to 12 following the indications of scientific studies (Nakajima et al., 2019). The test results revealed a significant difference in the dimension "saying no and cutting off interactions". A descriptive statistical analysis of the mean for each item in this dimension was conducted to explore this significant difference. It was observed that students aged between 10 and 12 present a higher mean in all items of this dimension (see Table 9).

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U test for questionnaire dimensions as a function of student age.

Age	Dimensions	U de Mann-Whitney	Wisconsin	Z	Sig.
1. (6-9 years)	Saying "no" and cutting off interactions	88094,500	185114.500	–2,001	0.004
	Make suggestions to third parties	88076,500	194588.500	–0.576	0.736
	Expressing emotions	87655,500	18687.000	–0.166	0.138
	Expressing opinions	88877,500	186578.500	–1.479	0.073
2. (10-12 years)	Peer group relationship	85678,500	189004,000	–0.378	0.172

Table 9. Average acquisition of social skills according to the age of the students in the dimension "saying no or cutting off interactions".

Dimension: Ability to say no or cut off interactions	6-9 years	10-12 years
Item 18: If a salesperson insists on showing me a product I don't want, I find it difficult to tell him or her that "I don't want them ".	x̄=1.75	x̄=1.78
Item 19: When I am in a hurry and a friend calls me on the phone, I have a hard time hanging up.	x̄=1.92	x̄=1.86
Item 20: When I am asked to borrow my things, I lend them even if I don't want to or don't like them. I don't know how to say "no".	x̄=1.78	x̄=1.98
Item 21: I don't know how to tell a friend who talks a lot to shut	x̄=1.92	x̄=2.02

Dimension: Ability to say no or cut off interactions	6-9 years	10-12 years
up.		
Item 22: When I decide that I don't feel like meeting a friend, I have a hard time telling them.	$\bar{x}$=1.75	$\bar{x}$=2.01
Item 23: When a friend tells me he or she wants to play with me, I don't know how to say "no" if I don't feel like it.	$\bar{x}$=1.83	$\bar{x}$=1.99
Item 24: I find it difficult to ask for the return of something, I lent.	$\bar{x}$= 1.51	$\bar{x}$=1.74
Item 25: If a restaurant does not bring me the food as I ordered it, I find it difficult to ask for it to be made again.	$\bar{x}$=1.79	$\bar{x}$=1.86

Note: Results obtained from the questionnaire "social skills for intercultural elementary school students" (Aranda et al., 2023).

5. Discussion

The objective of this research was to compare the social skills of elementary school students in different contexts according to the variables age, gender and place of birth. First, the necessary statistical studies were carried out to determine the significant differences in social skills between boys and girls at this school stage. It has been observed that both genders possess social skills to a greater or lesser extent based on the findings obtained. However, boys obtained higher scores than girls in terms of their ability to "say no and cutting off interactions" and to "make suggestions to third parties" such as assertively expressing a rejection to a salesperson if they do not want the product offered showing courtesy when saying goodbye to a friend in a hurry, requesting the return of borrowed objects or requesting in a restaurant that their dish be prepared according to their specifications (Maleki et al., 2019; Wikman, Allodi, & Ferrer-Wreder, 2022). Similarly, they possess competencies to engage in conversations with peers who propose that they participate in recreational activities without relying on the assistance of a confidant and even demonstrate skills to praise their friends in case they consider that they have performed some meritorious action. Male students in the elementary education stage have greater capacity to interact and lead others which implies more developed assertive and communicative skills. It has been shown that conflicts are resolved more effectively among male students who tend to reach agreements through suggestions in negotiations more easily than their female counterparts. This coincides with previous studies in which it was shown that male elementary school students presented greater capacities to interact and lead others having to show assertive and communicative skills that implied making suggestions when necessary (Borgonovi, Han, & Greiff, 2023). In agreement with studies where it has been shown that conflict situations are better settled by male students since they reach agreements through suggestions in negotiations more easily than their female counterparts (Berrios, Martos, & Martos, 2020; Sanmartín, Gonzálvez, & Vicent, 2018; Wang, Degol, Amemiya, Parr, & Guo, 2020). The fact that children have higher levels in the aforementioned dimensions may be due to the fact that socially, from childhood, men are required to have a more active and responsible form of behavior (Maleki et al., 2019) where assertiveness plays a fundamental role. Furthermore, communication between equals is encouraged in educational environments (Andrade, Mendoza, Zapata, & Sierra, 2020; Aydis & Akyol, 2018) which is the ideal scenario in which to express suggestions to third parties. On the other hand, the results confirm that the natives have higher scores in the dimension related to "making suggestions to third parties" which implies that these students have greater abilities to ask a friend to let him play, take initiative to talk on the phone, accept and say a compliment, speak shamelessly in front of his group of friends and make returns in stores if something he doesn't like or doesn't fit well regarding the place of birth of the students. This may be because cultural proximity to the context favors the reinforcement of interpersonal skills which include active listening and the elaboration of messages towards peers with safe and reliable attitudes (Rodríguez-Izquierdo & González-Faraco, 2021). Furthermore, when they are in familiar contexts, students are more sociable and open to the environment, thus favoring interaction between peers (Liu-Farrer, Yeoh, & Baas, 2021; Micó-Cebrián, Cava, & Buelga, 2019). Therefore, nationality influences the development of social skills in students because the traditions and customs that make it up condition the dialogue between members of the community and the acquisition of specific social skills (Hakimi, Fazil, Khaliqyar, Quchi, & Sajid, 2023; Vargas, Yana, Perez, Chura, & Alanoca, 2020).

Finally, another variables analyzed in this study was age. Regarding the age variable, the results suggest that students in the second stage of elementary school between 10 and 12 years old show a greater social predisposition to be assertive and cut off interactions when they consider it necessary. This indicates that as students grow, they improve and acquire more advanced social skills which is reflected in their ability to initiate interactions, participate in group activities and respond appropriately in situations of help and cooperation (Garaigordobil, 2018; Guo et al., 2023). That is why at these ages, students have greater skills to be able to say "no" to a salesperson if he shows them something that does not appeal to them, hang up on a friend if they are in a hurry, not lend something if they do not like it, ask a friend to be quiet if they talk too much, refuse to meet up with a friend or play with them if they don't feel like it, ask for something they borrowed for a while and demand the food from a restaurant exactly as it was ordered. Social conditioning means that as the student grows, he or she improves and becomes more skilled in attitudes that involve praising and complimenting other classmates, initiating interactions, joining games or activities and responding appropriately in situations of help and cooperation (Salimi & Fauziah, 2023). Therefore, the results obtained in this study strengthen the premise that as the student experiences an increase in age; their capacity for social skills is enhanced.

6. Conclusion

After an in-depth analysis, this study has yielded revealing results by demonstrating that male students show a more advanced level of social skills compared to other groups studied regardless of their intercultural status. This finding challenges the idea that cultural diversity may have a determining influence on the development of these

skills by highlighting the prominence of gender as a significant factor. The finding highlights the profound influence of social conditioning on the formation and evolution of social skills showing how cultural expectations and norms can exert a differential impact depending on the gender of the individual. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of considering the role of gender and age in the acquisition and manifestation of these skills which emphasizes the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon studied.

These results offer a more complete view of the interaction between the individual and his or her social environment highlighting the importance of addressing gender differences in promoting the comprehensive development of social skills in the educational and social spheres. This deeper understanding may have important implications for the design of educational and social interventions aimed at optimizing the social skills of all students regardless of their cultural context.

7. Suggestions and Implications

It is essential to take certain limitations into account despite the study's contributions to scientific knowledge on the social skills of elementary school students in different contexts. It would be necessary to expand the collection of information through qualitative or mixed research to complement the data obtained in this study.

Furthermore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results by focusing on students from southern Spain. It is suggested that the sample be expanded in future research to include students from different regions of the country. This study contributes to the existing body of scientific knowledge on the social skills of elementary school students in diverse contexts despite these limitations. It defines a profile of students who could benefit from more focused educational attention on learning and developing social skills. Therefore, educational specialists are urged to take these findings into account to improve interventions to this end which in turn would promote stronger intercultural relationships among elementary school students in today's schools. This improvement is of utmost relevance given the increasing diversity and multiculturalism of today's society.

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