SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Luis Pablo Hernández-López
Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology
University of Granada.
ORCID: 0000-0003-0537-6587
luisphernandez@correo.ugr.es
Miriam Romero-López
Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology
University of Granada
ORCID: 0000-0001-5697-3416
miriam@ugr.es

ABSTRACT

This systematic review aimed to analyze the relationship between social competence and self-esteem in any type of population. The inclusion criteria selected were: (i) studies with results of the relationship between social competence and self-esteem; (ii) experimental and observational empirical studies; (iii) original full-text scientific journal articles written in English. Exclusion criteria referred to studies that could not be included in the inclusion criteria. The search platforms were ProQuest and the meta-search engines SCOPUS and Web of Science. The risk of bias was assessed with the Q-SSP quality checklist and the method of summary of the results was performed with a Microsoft Excel table. The results of the selected studies revealed a correlation between social competence and self-esteem indirectly, so it is concluded that social competence is positively related to self-esteem. Limitations are recognized in terms of the low number of studies found and the restricted variety of experimental designs.

Keywords: social competence; social-emotional competence; interpersonal competence; self-esteem; self-concept

RESUMEN

Competencia social y autoestima: una revisión sistemática. Esta revisión sistemática tuvo como objetivo analizar la relación entre la competencia social y la autoestima en cualquier tipo de población. Los criterios de inclusión seleccionados fueron: (i) estudios con resultados de la relación entre competencia social y autoestima; (ii) estudios empíricos experimentales y observacionales; (iii) artículos originales de revistas cientí-

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ficas a texto completo escritos en inglés. Los criterios de exclusión se referían a los estudios que no podían incluirse en los criterios de inclusión. Las plataformas de búsqueda fueron ProQuest y los metabuscadores SCO-PUS y Web of Science. El riesgo de sesgo se evaluó con la lista de control de calidad Q-SSP y el método de resumen de los resultados se realizó con una tabla de Microsoft Excel. Los resultados de los estudios seleccionados revelaron una correlación entre la competencia social y la autoestima de forma indirecta, por lo que se concluye que la competencia social se relaciona positivamente con la autoestima. Se reconocen limitaciones en cuanto al bajo número de estudios encontrados y la restringida variedad de diseños experimentales.

Palabras clave: competencia social; competencia socio-emocional; competencia interpersonal; autoestima; autoconcepto

INTRODUCTION

According to Bisquerra & Pérez (2007), social competence could be conceptualized as the ability to perform adequately in interpersonal relationships and the use of effective communication skills (assertiveness, empathy, respect, and prosocial attitudes) in such relationships. In addition to that, this same construct has also been defined as a capacity that involves several positive qualities and traits, such as popularity, positive self-image, social affirmation, frequency of interactions with peers, or social skills (Matson, 2009).

On the other hand, self-esteem is defined as the evaluation of self-concept, having great importance in the interpretation of one's opinions, self-behavior, and emotions (Bezinovi , 1988). If we agree with Rosenber's (1979) theoretical model of self-concept, self-esteem is a section that is integrated by specific aspects of self-concept, and in turn, subordinated to its other categories. In this sense, it is interesting to note that the same model differentiates between external self-esteem, which is based on the evaluations of the social environment, and internal self-esteem, which is acquired from one's own experiences.

The study of the relationship between these two concepts is important because low levels of self-esteem can be the reason for psychological distress and can decrease the subject's social competence. And in turn, an improvement in self-esteem would increase the probability of an increase in social competence, which would imply an appropriate performance of the individual in his or her context (Zaff & Hair, 2003).

All this also leads to the assumption that higher self-esteem would be related to the adoption of positive modes of behavior in conflict management (Hay et al., 2000; Rodríguez-Ruiz et al., 2015) while lower self-esteem would correlate with the use of aggression as a correct behavior for conflict resolution (Diaz-Aguado & Martinez, 2015).

Following previous studies, these findings make us see that self-esteem and resilience are associated with social competence in youth and adolescents. These works have shown that those who perceive themselves as having greater competence in the social sphere also have a better self-concept, i.e., they have higher self-esteem and greater resilience due to the high number of positive social relationships (Childs et al., 2001; Libório & Ungar, 2014). Similarly, perceived good social competence has a significant effect on self-esteem (Bedard et al., 2020) as it is influenced by positive experiences with others (Williams, 2009); therefore, it would be logical to think that those with lower social coping skills present lower self-esteem (Dembi ska et al., 2020a).

On the other hand, other studies reveal the association between high perceived social competence, higher levels of emotional regulation, high academic performance, constructive coping strategies, and healthy self-concept in the child and adolescent population; (Franco et al., 2017). In this vein, a study conducted on the adolescent population found that self-esteem was also a mediator in the relationship between social exclusion and life satisfaction and that it decreased the harmful effects of social exclusion (Arslan, 2019).

Despite all this research, it cannot yet be said that we can establish conclusive explanations about the relationship studied, as we still lack strong and certain evidence. Therefore, we have considered it necessary to review the scientific literature and systematize and organize the findings found in the most current studies to be able to propose definitive explanations and clear conclusions.

Thus, to continue advancing in research in an area of study as novel as it is relevant for the educational field,

such as the application of social competence to self-esteem, we justify the need to analyze the most recent scientific literature in this field. Consequently, we conducted this study by posing the following research question: What type of relationship exists between social competence and self-esteem in students of any age?

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this paper is to review the scientific literature and systematize and organize the findings found in the most current studies to establish clear explanations and definitive conclusions about the relationship between social competence and self-esteem in the student population.

PARTICIPANTS

Students from all educational levels who appear as a sample population in any of the research studies selected according to the established criteria have been chosen as participants in this analysis.

METHOD

This systematic review was based on published studies on social competence and its relationship with self-esteem. For its development, we followed the Cochrane Collaboration guidelines (Green & Higgins, 2008) and the guidelines of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) statement in its 2020 revision (Page et al., 2021; Yepes-Nuñez et al., 2021) to provide rigor to the process of conducting the review. The protocol of this systematic review was preliminarily published on the INPLASY platform (International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) with the protocol number INPLASY202240149 and DOI code 10.37766/inplasy2022.4.0149.

Information sources

For the systematic review, the electronic bibliographic databases that were used included: Psychology, Biomedical, and Multidisciplinary Sciences, as well as the ProQuest search platform and the SCOPUS and Web of Science meta-search engines. The electronic databases used were MEDLINE, Psychology Database, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycInfo, SCOPUS, and Web of Science Core Collection.

The search was conducted before March 31, 2022, setting a search period from the beginning of the year 2000 to that date.

The search criteria defined keywords and terms in these combinations: ((self-esteem) AND ((social competenc*) OR (socioemotional competenc*) OR (interpersonal competenc*)))

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria and the research question were defined through the approach PICOS (Population, Intervention, Comparator, Outcomes, Study design) (Booth et al., 2016) (Table 1).

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Table 1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria according to the approach P.I.C.O.S.(Booth et al., 2016)

PICOS	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population	Students of any age	Other kinds of population
Intervention	None	None
Comparator	None	None
Outcomes	Positive or negative correlation between one or more components of social competence and self-esteem, mediated or not through other variables.	Studies that do not consider the relationship between social competence and self-esteem variables.
Study design	Quantitative studies: experimental and observational studies (descriptive or analytical)	Other types of studies
Additional criteria	Original full-text scientific journal articles written in English.	Other types of texts (review articles with or without meta-analysis, letters to publishers, errata, abstracts of conferences, books or book chapters, ...).
Research question	What kind of relationship exists between social competence and self-esteem in students of any age?	

RESULTS

Study Identification and Selection

The first search revealed 111 titles. These titles were organized in a reference management software program (Mendeley Desktop, PDFNet SDK copyright © PDFTron™ Systems Inc., New York, NY, USA). Duplicates (1 reference) were removed automatically and no records marked as illegible were found.

The records were then selected by evaluating the titles and abstracts. The final result of this search process was 44 studies.

Next, a table of Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA) to re-evaluate the results extracted in full text. The exclusion criteria for each discarded article were specified in the table.

Figure 1 shows the flow diagram of articles at each stage of the selection process for the 5 included studies.

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Figure 1
PRISMA 2020 flowchart for new systematic reviews including searches of databases, registries, and other sources.
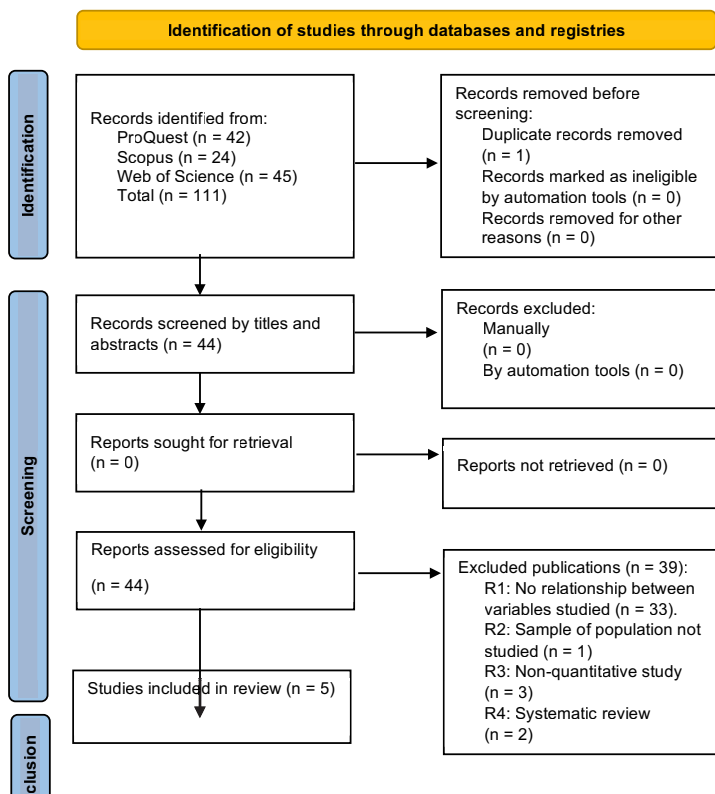
The characteristics of the 5 studies included in the results are shown in Table 2. Four of the 5 articles finally selected in the review were descriptive and correlational, and one of them had a quasi-experimental design (Resurrección et al., 2021). In addition, all of them presented a positive and indirect relationship between social competence and self-esteem.

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Table 2. Characteristics of the studies included in the review

Study	Methods and sample	Instruments	Summary of Results	Statistical Analysis	Statistical Parameters
Moran & McCosker (2012)	Descriptive and correlational. n = 201 university students. Australia.	Humor Styles Questionnaire *HSQ* (Martin et al., 2003). Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory *RSI* single-item version (Robins et al., 2001). Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire *ICQ* (Buhrmester et al., 1988).	Interpersonal competence (1) and self-esteem (2) are associated with affiliative humor.	Hierarchical multiple regression.	(1) b = .25 P = 0.001 (2) b = .24 P = 0.001
Garaigordobil et al. (2017)	Descriptive, correlational and cross-sectional. n = 420 school students. Spain.	Child Depression Scale Spanish version *CDS* self-assessment, (Seisdedos, 2003). Behavior Assessment System for Children and Adolescents Spanish version *BASC-S2* (Jaureguizar et al., 2012). Screening for Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems *SPECI* (Teacher version) (Garaigordobil et al., 2017). Cuestionario de Autoconcepto *CAG* [Self-concept Questionnaire] (García, 2001). Social Skills Improvement System *SSIS* (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents *RSCA* (Prince-Embury, 2008). Inventario de estrés cotidiano infantil *IECI* [Inventory of Daily Stress in Children] (Trianes et al., 2011).	Children with high scores on depression are more likely to have a low personal adjustment (social competence (1)), low global self-concept (self-esteem (2)), and poor social skills.	Multiple linear regression analysis	(1) b = -.263 (2) b = -.142
Dembińska et al. (2020a)	Descriptive and correlational. n = 506 university students. Poland.	The Excessive Internet Use Scale *EIUS* (Dembińska et al., 2020b). Self-Esteem Scale *SES* Polish version (Ochnik & Mandal, 2016).	Social competence is a mediating variable between self-esteem and excessive Internet use.	Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation	*b = 0.04 SE = 0.02 CI: 0.01, 0.08*
Resurrección et al. (2021)	Quasi-experimental. n = 221 school students. Spain.	Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire *SECQ* (Zhou & Ee, 2012). Self-esteem Scale short version (Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008).	There were positive changes in self-esteem, social-emotional competencies, and school-related outcomes after they participated in a socio-educational program.	Multi-group design with covariates (ANCOVA)	(1) F = 4.39 p = 0.03 n² = 0.03 (2) F = 2.15 p = 0.14 n² = 0.01
Caqueo-Urízar et al. (2022)	Descriptive and correlational. n = 2277 school students. Chile.	Child and Youth Resilience Measure *CYRM- 12* (Liebenberg et al., 2013). Sistema de Evaluación de Niños y Adolescentes *SENA* [Child and Adolescent Assessment System] (Fernández-Pinto et al., 2015). The Satisfaction with Life Scale- Child *SWLS-C* (Gadermann et al., 2010).	Social competence enhances life satisfaction through self-esteem.	Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)	r = .476 *** (r > .3; medium direct effect)

Study Quality

The 5 included studies scored 85.54% on the quality checklist Q-SSP (Quality Assessment Checklist for Survey Studies in Psychology) (Protogerou & Hagger, 2020), which is considered good quality (Table 3).

Two authors performed the study evaluation process independently (L.P.H. and M.R.). In the final stage, a meeting was planned in which discussions were held to compare and resolve discrepancies.

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Table 3 Quality checklist scores Q-SSP

Study domain	Moran & McCosker (2012)	Garaigord obil et al. (2017)	Dembińsk a et al. (2020a)	Resurreci ón et al. (2021)	Caqueo-Urízar et al. (2022)	Total
			Studies			
Introduction	4	4	4	4	4	20
Participants	3	3	1	3	1	11
Data	8	8	6	8	7	37
Ethics	1	2	2	2	2	9
Total	16 (88,88%)	17 (94,44%)	13 (72,22%)	17 (94,44%)	14 (77,77%)	77 (85,54%)

DISCUSSION

This review had the purpose of evaluating the results provided by the scientific literature to check the existence of a positive relationship between social competence and self-esteem in the student population.

To begin with, we should talk about the diversity found when defining and measuring social competence and self-esteem. First of all, each of the selected studies has had a different instrument. Among the questionnaires chosen to assess these variables, we can highlight the most classic ones such as the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) by Buhrmester et al. (1988), for social competence, or the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS) by Rosenber (1979), for self-esteem, both in Moran & McCosker (2012). Although, we can also outline many others such as the Self-Esteem Scale SES Polish version (Ochnik & Mandal, 2016), Self-esteem Scale short version (Tuominen-Soini et al., 2008) or Sistema de Evaluación de Niños y Adolescentes SENA [Child and Adolescent Assessment System] (Fernández-Pinto et al., 2015).

Secondly, as a characteristic of this review, it should also be noted that sometimes the study variables are defined with similar but not exact terms such as "personal adjustment" as social competence or "global self-concept" for self-esteem (Garaigordobil et al., 2017).

These two aforementioned qualities could imply inaccuracies when it comes to systematically specifying the relationship between the two terms, in such a way that the ideal would have been to have variables with the same definitions and the same measurement instruments in the studies found.

On the other hand, we have to say that using the criterion of inclusion of the educational environment has led to the appearance of studies carried out with samples of school or university students exclusively, although with similar results. In both cases, the relationship between social competence and self-esteem is indirectly related or mediated through other variables such as "affiliative humor" (Moran & McCosker, 2012), "child depression" (Garaigordobil et al., 2017), "excessive Internet use" (Dembi ska et al., 2020), "school-related outcomes" (Resurrección et al., 2021) or "life satisfaction" (Caqueo-Urízar et al., 2022).

In addition, it is also important to say that almost all the studies selected in this review have a descriptive and correlational methodological design. Only in a few of the papers (Resurrección et al., 2021) can we observe a quasi-experimental design, which may indicate that the relationship between the terms studied cannot yet be established with complete certainty due to this scarce methodological and numerical variety.

Finally, it should be recognized that the present systematic review has some limitations. The main one is that the studies were selected in three databases with certain inclusion criteria that could have limited the search, such as studies written in English or free full-text articles. This could have resulted in the omission of relevant studies

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that would have been omitted from our review. Furthermore, the majority of the included studies have a small sample size. of participants and only a small number of published articles were found so all these conditioning factors could have affected our research in addition to the restricted variety of experimental designs.

CONCLUSION

Following the results revealed in this review, we concluded that a positive and significant relationship was found between social competence and self-esteem in the student population indirectly through mediating variables. As a consequence of this finding, we believe that intervention and training programs should be developed for students to improve the educational quality and the possibility of social success of this population.

In conclusion, after this search and analysis, it seems sensible to affirm that there is a relationship between social competence and self-esteem and that, consequently, an improvement in one variable positively influences the other.

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