

Precariousness, inequalities and emotional health care practices in university students**Precariedad, desigualdades y prácticas de atención de la salud emocional en estudiantes universitarios**

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Abstract*Objectives*

The objective of this research was to identify emotional affectations in university students and the relationship they have with their learning in times of pandemic as well as their sociocultural context. For this purpose, the sociological perspective of Pierre Bourdieu was recovered with the intention of articulating the production of subjectivities from their objective conditions.

Methodology

Methodologically, two moments were established: 1) construction of social classes based on their volume and capital structure and 2) establish the relationship of their perceptions about emotions and learning by constructed social classes.

Contribution

The findings suggest that given the difference between the precariousness and the inequalities that deprive them, their perceptions and dispositions in this educational transition affect an inadequate attention to emotional problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that socialization in the virtual educational field demands the consideration that the social experience must face all the vital structures, including cognition, emotions and the will of social agents.

Subjectivities, Affectations, Inequalities, Sociocultural**Resumen***Objetivos*

El objetivo de esta investigación fue identificar afectaciones emocionales en estudiantes universitarios y la relación que guardan con su aprendizaje en época de pandemia, así como su contexto sociocultural. Para tal efecto, se recuperó la perspectiva sociológica de Pierre Bourdieu con la intención de articular la producción de subjetividades a partir de sus condiciones objetivas.

Metodología

Metodológicamente, se establecieron dos momentos: 1) construcción de clases sociales con base en su volumen y estructura de capital y 2) establecer la relación de sus percepciones sobre emociones y aprendizaje por clases sociales construidas.

Contribución

Los hallazgos sugieren que ante la diferencia entre las precariedades y las desigualdades que privan en ellos, sus percepciones y disposiciones en esta transición educativa inciden una inadecuada atención de los problemas emocionales. Por lo que se puede concluir que la socialización en el ámbito educativo virtual demanda la consideración que la experiencia social debe enfrentarse con la totalidad de las estructuras vitales, entre ellas la cognición, las emociones y la voluntad de los agentes sociales.

Subjetividades, Afectaciones, Desigualdades, Sociocultural

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Introduction

The relationship between the socio-cultural environment and emotions in social agents has undoubtedly been studied for some time, such is the case of the evidence regarding the relationship between mathematics skills and the socio-economic level of students, the higher the social skills, the better the mathematics performance and vice versa (San Martín & Tyrso, 2010), on the other hand, the main source of educational inequality in Latin America is the social and economic conditions of the students' families of origin:

[...] more specifically, the cultural level of the families is the composite factor that is able to explain most of the variance in students' academic performance; and the highest level of education attained by the student's mother is the best simple variable. In other words, the main source of educational inequality in the region is the economic and socio-cultural inequality of students' families of origin (Murillo & Román, 2008, p. 28).

Although there is no relationship between IQ and emotional intelligence, it has been determined that there is a relationship between the latter and academic performance (Pérez, 2006). This seems to indicate that the academic achievement of students depends on a favourable emotional environment, which in turn is regulated by the relationships between the social agents that interact in each area of knowledge (Castrejón, Cantero & Pérez, 2008), although not only does it depend on this, but the personal attitudes of the agents also have a significant influence on their academic achievement (Gargallo, Pérez, Serra, Sánchez & Ross, 2007).

In addition, there is evidence of the importance of emotions for learning mathematics, although it should be mentioned that there is a historical separation of cognitive functions and emotions, considering them to be antagonistic (Gómez-Chacón, 2002), despite the existence of trends towards the integration of cognitive, social, cultural, economic and, of course, political elements. This conception seems to have shortcomings, given that nowadays the importance of integrating both the affective and cognitive spheres is recognised, not only in the training of students, but also in that of teachers as the articulating axes of mathematical learning.

In this sense, the review of works classified under a positivist stance shows the relationship between socio-cultural level, emotional environment and academic performance, manifested through statistical studies (mainly analysis of covariance and linear regression), but still does not provide answers in those cases in which, for example, students with unfavourable social, cultural and emotional conditioning achieve high levels of performance and a social mobility that, initially, was forbidden to them.

However, from a hermeneutic point of view, instrumental competences are closely related to the cognition of individuals, and given that this is not genetically determined, but invented and culturally transmitted, it can be assumed that cognitive reorganisation is thus an everyday phenomenon (Wilson, 2010).

If an individual is at least partially a concretion of a collective, it is necessary to understand the socio-cultural context from which he or she comes in order to interpret the situations he or she lives, such is the case of asymmetrical socialisation processes in which social agents with greater skills are able to mobilise cognitive resources with respect to other agents with lower communicative skills and abilities in the generation of inferences (León, Solari, Olmos & Escudero, 2011).

Socialisation recognises the subjectivity of the social agent, but also intersubjectivity at the moment of the relationship between agents, which is why it is considered that emotions, as a social construction, are part of subjectivity and that they also have psychological, physiological, cultural and individual dimensions, where social interaction plays a determining role (Fericgla, 2011); It can therefore be assumed that an individual placed in a given situation, at a precise moment in his or her life and in a given context, does not react to external stimuli with the same emotional charge as at another moment in his or her biographical path or in another context.

With respect to gender difference, its formation has been determined in the early stages of the subjects derived from the somewhat differential inculcation processes that girls have compared to boys, which leads to women having a higher index of emotional intelligence than men (Sánchez, Fernández, Montañez & Latorre, 2008). This exemplifies the relevance of the history of the body - Bourdieu's notion of habitus or, as Husserl established, the shaping of consciousness through the history of the agent - in the development of subjectivity, hence the consideration that emotions, as bodily dynamics, have an impact on the implementation of actions that are made possible by the emotions of individuals (Maturana & Varela, 2004).

Recently, the concept of emotional competence has been coined (Bisquerra & Pérez, 2007), understood as a set of socio-personal competences that are classified into: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, emotional autonomy, social competence, life skills and well-being. This classification has made it possible to approach emotional competences as a social satisfier, since it conceives an application of these competences in different social and productive sectors, where the importance of some instruments such as: curriculum vitae and emotional map of the candidate, as relevant elements for good emotional management in leadership, is mentioned.

In addition, the notion of emotional competences has also been used in the productive sector, where socio-emotional competences have been revalued in the personal sphere and the labour market, thus making evident the double importance that emotional environments have for academic and work performance (Talavera & Pérez-González, 2007).

Therefore, there is a tendency to explain the levels of academic performance and the socio-cultural conditions of the students. In this position, the level of poverty, the academic training of the parents - but mainly of the student's mother - and the symbolic resources, among others, are recognised as explanatory variables. However, there are also studies that show that the cause-effect relationship does not always have a positive correlation, that is, there are agents who, even with conditions considered unfavourable, present satisfactory academic results in certain tests, where an explanatory variable may be the emotional environment of the agents.

In this sense, various researchers (Eurasquin, Diego Correa, García and Gómez, 2022) refer to the importance of the context in the training of teachers and psychologists, where spaces in metropolitan areas present advantages and privileges for students who live in them, a situation that contrasts with their counterparts who live in marginalised areas. In light of this, students developed empathy and recognised resilience as fundamental elements in the training process.

It is evident that the causal positioning adopted by positivist studies is insufficient insofar as it presents an isolated treatment of the explanatory variables; on the other hand, hermeneutic and critical studies recognise both the individual conditions and those of a social, cultural and emotional order of the agents as interpretative variables of their practices, in this case educational practices, recognising the processes of subjectivity but also of intersubjectivity in the relationships between socialised and socialising agents.

These studies also recognise the importance of the primary socialisation of the agents and not only the secondary socialisation (attributed more to educational institutions), this means a recognition of the transcendence of the past to understand the present, moreover, the integration of elements from various disciplines where the cognitive, social, cultural, economic, political, and individual aspects would allow articulating a broader understanding of the educational reality is recognised.

However, opinions, perceptions, beliefs, feelings and positions, among others, are elements of subjectivity, which is why their study has generated some controversy due to the non-generalisability of their results and interpretations. However, it has been established that:

The recognition of subjectivities requires a knowledge of the social with a dynamic, unstable and circumstantial character, where language, experiences, the culture of each learner, the educational management model, relations of homology and domination, values and emotions among other explanatory variables, play a very important role (Guerrero-Azpeitia, 2017, p. 61).

Finally, the construction that Fericgla (Op. cit) puts forward on emotions is recovered, for whom these are open mental and physical processes, very complex and basic in our lives, with physiological, psychological, cultural and individual dimensions. In accordance with all of the above, the following research questions were posed: what are the perceptions of university students regarding emotions in their formative process in times of contingency? What is the relationship between these perceptions and their socio-cultural context?

In order to answer these questions, the objective was to characterise university students' perceptions of emotions and their academic training in a transition from face-to-face to virtual education through a sociological study. This approach made it possible to focus on elements of subjectivity in accordance with the social, economic and cultural conditions of university students.

Theoretical references

It is important to mention that the theoretical proposal of the French sociologist should not be seen as an objectivist expression, but on the contrary, as a bet that allows recovering the relationship between objective and subjective sense as a concretion of social practices.

Thus, the aforementioned formula recovers three of the nodal concepts of the aforementioned author's theory of the economy of social practices: field, capital and *habitus*.

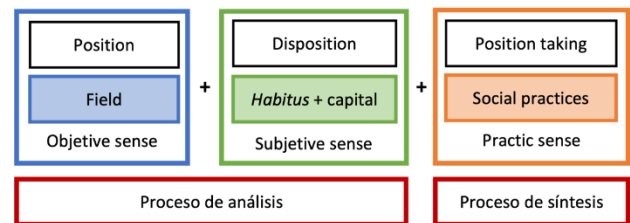


Figure 1 Social practice as a relationship between the objective and subjective senses

Source: Guerrero-Azpeitia (2020, p. 118)

The field can be understood, in a very brief way since it is not of interest in this article to go deeper into this concept, as that relationship of objective relations that social agents have with each other and which allows them to position themselves in the social space; however, this position is related to the volume and structure of the capital they possess.

By capital, we can conceptualise accumulated labour, which can be presented in different ways (material, internalised or incorporated state) but which does not exist outside the field that originated it, its classification can be: economic, cultural, social, symbolic, etc. On the other hand, habitus is the history incorporated by the agent or social entity, which, as a materialisation of the collective memory, conditions social practices. It is important to mention that the three concepts (and some others) are articulated and intimately related in their concreteness.

In addition, social agents will establish reproduction strategies, which have as precursors the volume and structure of their own capital and the very field where they were formed, but also the field where the social agent develops his or her practice, fields which may or may not coincide. Such strategies denote in the first instance coercions within the framework of objective but also subjective structures, but at the same time they provide a series of active "resources" to these coercions, i.e. there is a kind of dynamism in social practices.

In addition, a set of social agents can present similar conditions and, at the same time, employ more or less similar strategies of reproduction, it is in this sense that Bourdieu states that:

...the agents are distributed in the totality of social e-space [Sic.], in the first dimension according to the overall volume of capital they possess, in the second dimension according to the composition of their capital, i.e. according to the relative weight of the various types of capital in their total capital, especially economic and cultural capital, and in the third dimension according to the evolution over time of the volume and composition of their capital, i.e. according to their trajectory in social space (2001, p. 106).

This proposal serves as a basis for the analytical construction of social classes which, possessing similar trajectories, capitals, habitus and evolutions, tend to present a regularity characteristic of this conglomerate. Although it is not possible to consider a deterministic position in this respect, it is possible to speak of a regularity in the practices of social agents.

Description of the method

The study of subjectivity necessarily evokes qualitative approaches to social research since, as referred to by Sandín quoted by Dorio, Sabariego and Massot (2009, p. 276), it is "a systemic activity aimed at the in-depth understanding of educational and social phenomena, the transformation of socio-educational practices and scenarios, decision-making and also the discovery of an organised body of knowledge". In this sense, qualitative research demands an ontological and epistemological positioning and, of course, a methodological and technical perspective.

In other words, language and personal experiences, values and emotions are related to educational policies, management models of educational institutions and socio-economic contexts, among others, represent explanatory variables that allow characterising it under a dynamic but unstable and circumstantial perspective at the same time (Guerrero-Azpeitia, 2017).

Thus, in order to rescue the characteristic peculiarities of subjectivity, a sociological perspective was selected that was congruent with the theoretical approach and multivariate analysis techniques, all from a relational perspective that at the same time allowed the data to be constructed from a systematisation of the objective conditions, but without overlooking the understanding of the particular subjectivity of the students mediated from their perceptions.

In this sense, the methodological strategy consisted of two clearly defined moments: 1) construction of analytical social classes based on the volume and structure of capital and 2) construction of the relationship between social classes and the corresponding perceptions based on multivariate analysis techniques. The unit of analysis was the Centro Universitario Hidalguense and the target population was students of the Bachelor of Education Sciences.

An instrument was designed in Google forms and consisted of three sections: a) general socio-economic and cultural data; b) technological skills and resources; and c) detection of student perceptions. The first two sections were closed-ended questions and the third was a Likert scale.

For the construction of the data, reference was made in the first instance to the multidimensional analysis whose particularity is the concretion of both objective and subjective dimensions, specifically, the analysis of multiple correspondences was adopted whose main characteristic is the generation of perceptual maps that facilitate the evaluation and interpretation of the interdependence between the variables or categories selected by the researcher (Hair, Anderson, Tathan & Black, 1999).

Results

Socio-cultural context

100% of the respondents were women, 25% of whom live in metropolitan areas, the remainder in semi-rural regions, and the average age was 27 years. Every second household has 5 or more persons, every fourth household has up to 4 persons, and every fourth household has 3 persons or less. One in five women is single, one in four lives in a union or is divorced.

With regard to the education of the parents of the surveyed women, a tendency was identified to establish a parental relationship between the father and the mother where the former has less academic qualifications than the latter, except in the case where the father has secondary education, the mother tends to have primary education or no education at all. On the other hand, and with respect to the occupation of both parents, a relevant association is also identified, as they tend to be employed in low-skilled, low-skilled or medium-skilled jobs (agriculture / worker / housewife, employee / employee, SME owner / owner, etc.).

Construction of social classes

After this description, we proceeded to the construction of analytical social classes by considering three types of capital: objectified economic, embodied cultural and social. The result, taking into consideration the volume and structure of capital, was: class A (low volume), class B (medium) and class C (high).

Perceptions of emotional health as a function of constructed social class

Classes A and C presented a preponderance of job losses and anxiety attacks, while Class B also presented apathy and lack of motivation to carry out their daily and educational activities. With regard to who the students turn to when they present emotional problems that merit attention, it is found that: 1) class C always tends to seek support from specialists (psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists), teachers and, if necessary, classmates, 2) class A and B did not show significant differences and tend to socialise very little with friends, family and teachers, and occasionally with specialists and classmates. The above results suggest that those students with medium and high vulnerability conditions tend not to socialise their mental health problems.

Subsequently, interviews were conducted with students previously selected according to the social classes constructed. By way of illustration, three testimonies of students with different volume and structure of capital are presented, taking into consideration four central axes: at the time of the pandemic, how were your relationships with friends and family, as well as what are your perceptions about your professional and family future.

Student E1 (Class A: low volume and low capital structure)

Relations with friends.

“With some friends the relationship has been maintained, with others it has been lost, it is no longer the same. With some of them communication is sporadic, only in emergencies, and with others we have tried to maintain communication and it is possible to meet or make video calls”

Family relations

“At the beginning it was desperate, because we couldn't adapt to the changes, there was a lot of stress, shouting and anger, because everyone wanted their own space”

Professional future

“With a bit of uncertainty, in knowing how and under what circumstances I am going to face the world of work. Well, my learning was not the same during these two years. Many times it was only about complying with the planning and delivering evidence, but there was no concern about whether the student was learning”

Personal future

“With a bit of fear, but I am sure that I will achieve the long-term goals I set for myself when I started studying for my degree”

In this case, the socio-economic conditions and the consequent adversity are reflected in interpersonal and family relationships, which are accentuated by the lack of resources and the high number of family members. It can be observed that communication is weak, not only for the socialisation of daily events but also for the emotional problems they went through during the pandemic. In terms of perceptions about their professional and personal future, it can be identified that there is a relatively high level of uncertainty.

Student E2 (Class B: high volume and structure of capital)

Relations with friends

“I think that this has been slowed down, not in its totality, but with some people, since we no longer live together and we no longer know what is going on with each other as we used to do in face-to-face classes, so I think that I feel that I am not in communication”

Family relations

“In a certain way more trusting, although this sometimes leads to conflicts, however, these are due to living together and the stress of not going out as before”

Professional Future

“Sometimes at a loss, as at the moment I want to finish and move to another country, which would prevent me from practising.”

Personal future

“Bewildered as much of what I thought would be there is no longer and will not be there”

In this case, which illustratively represents students with an intermediate volume and structure of capital, it can be identified that they present similar situations to students in class A, although to a certain extent with less emotional charge and better emotional management. Regarding expectations about the professional and personal future, uncertainty prevails in this case as in the previous one.

Student E3 (Class C: average volume and structure of capital)

Relations with friends

“I consider interacting with people to be extremely indispensable and necessary. My relationships with friends have been limited, at the beginning of the pandemic it was only through digital media, in this last stage they have improved and we have interacted; however, not seeing them in the critical stage of the pandemic did not affect me emotionally, that is to say I did not miss interacting with them”

Family relations

“Due to the pandemic my parents lost their jobs which caused stress for the first few months of the pandemic, my mother suffered from depression which directly caused insomnia and stress in me. As the months went by, we asked for psychological help for my mother, who was the most affected, and this gave me greater peace of mind. There was more support, organisation and agreements between the family members and it allowed us to make the confinement more manageable”

Professional future

“I consider that I have the indispensable tools and experience to continue to perform favourably in my workplace; I have also acquired more knowledge to be able to contribute in administrative areas of the institution and with more experience in the use and development of technological devices and applications. This makes me see myself in a positive and confident way in my professional development and encourages me to continue my academic training”

Personal future

“Confident and secure because I have some entrepreneurial projects that can give me economic and emotional stability. Although these projects could stabilise me, I am a little stressed that my son will be going to university in a year and the economic costs are higher. I feel happy with what I have achieved so far and I predict a good future. The family is a fundamental and present part of me, as a moral support to be able to develop myself and my plans”.

Finally, in the case of students with a high volume and structure of capital, significant differences are observed with respect to students from other social classes. In the first instance, the importance of interpersonal relationships with friends is recognised, but they do not necessarily have a significant importance; however, in the case of family relationships, when some of the family members had emotional problems, they opted for the help of specialists (psychologists), which allowed intra-family relationships to improve. With regard to the perspective for personal and professional development, the expectations, although with traits of uncertainty, reflect a perspective oriented towards the fulfilment of significantly high goals for the students.

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Conclusions

Based on the analysis and discussion of the findings already referred to, it is possible to conclude, in a preliminary way, that it is those students with higher levels of precariousness (lower volume and structure of capital: economic, cultural and technological) who present higher levels of educational disadvantage derived from the transition from a face-to-face to a virtual educational modality.

In contrast, students whose social, cultural and economic conditions have greater resources required by this transition tend to have antagonistic and even favourable perceptions, and therefore tend to assume a playful position with respect to the aforementioned transition..

In this way, the incidence of socio-cultural inequalities and their consequent segmentation is identified in an inadequate attention to the emotional problems presented by students, which would mean a disadvantageous situation both in socialisation, treatment of emotional problems and academic achievement during a face-to-face educational transition.

This coincides with what has been reported by other researchers (Díaz-Barriga-Arceo, Alatorre-Rico & Castañeda-Solis, 2022) who refer to the importance of the interrelation between socio-cultural, institutional and, of course, family variables. In view of this, it is considered necessary to create the conditions in educational institutions that make it possible to conceive that social experience must be confronted with the totality of vital structures, including cognition, emotions and the very will of social agents.

Although Guerrero-Azpeitia (2022) recognises that social trajectories are fundamental for the construction of social classes, in this case and with the intention of establishing a descriptive study, they were not taken into consideration, so that for future work with a greater level of depth it is highly recommendable to include these trajectories.

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