CULTIVATING SOFT SKILLS IN ACADEMY: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly dynamic labor market, soft skills help individuals adapt to new roles, technologies, and work environments. It is crucial for pre-service teachers to strengthen competencies that enable them to interact more effectively and resolve conflicts, not only on a personal level but also within the educational community. This study aims to identify the soft skills perceived by pre-service teachers in the National and Foreign Languages Pedagogy program at ULEAM, as well as to analyze the benefits of shifting the educational focus towards the development and application of soft skills. The research follows a Socio-Critical paradigm and uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research. The sample includes 148 students, both male and female, enrolled from the first to the ninth semester, as well as 6 school administrators and 5 high school teachers from private, public, and religious institutions. The instruments used were a soft skills questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The findings show that administrators and high school teachers find the integration of soft skills into the curriculum challenging, particularly when applying active methodologies with the use of technology. Pre-service teachers perceive intercultural competence, adaptability, and decision-making as the most developed skills. The study concludes that teachers recognize their essential role in developing soft skills but require more institutional support, resources, and practical training to enhance their integration.

Key words: soft skills, competencies, education, pedagogy, cognitive.

CULTIVAR HABILIDADES BLANDAS EN LA ACADEMIA: ENFOQUES INNOVADORES EN LA EDUCACIÓN

RESUMEN

En un mundo laboral cada vez más dinámico, las habilidades blandas ayudan a los individuos a adaptarse a nuevos roles, tecnologías, y ambientes de trabajo, siendo necesario que los docentes en formación fortalezcan competencias que les permiten a interactuar de manera más eficiente y resolver conflictos no solo personales sino también a escala de comunidad educativa. Este estudio tiene como objetivo identificar las habilidades blandas que perciben los docentes enformación

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de la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros de la ULEAM, así como analizar los beneficios de innovar el enfoque principal de la educación hacia el desarrollo y aplicación de competencias blandas. Este trabajo se plantea desde el paradigma Socio Crítico y el enfoque es mixto cuantitativo y cualitativo de la investigación científica. La muestra la compone 148 estudiantes, hombres y mujeres matriculados desde el primer hasta el noveno semestre, 6 directivos y 5 docentes de educación media de instituciones particulares, fiscales y fiscomisionales. Los instrumentos utilizados son el cuestionario de habilidades blandas y entrevista a profundidad. Entre los hallazgos encontrados se evidencia que directivos y docentes de educación media reconocen desafiante la integración de las habilidades blandas al currículo aplicando metodologías activas con el uso de la tecnología. Los docentes en formación perciben la interculturalidad, adaptabilidad, y toma de decisiones como las habilidades más desarrolladas. Se concluye que los docentes reconocen su papel esencial en el desarrollo de las habilidades blandas, pero necesitan más apoyo institucional, recursos y formación práctica para potenciar su integración.

Palabras clave: habilidades blandas, competencias, educación, pedagogía, cognitivo.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education seems to be striving to prepare students for tasks in which machines excel over humans, such as performing repetitive tasks, financial risk analysis, and other similar processes.

According to Olivares (2007), soft skills are fundamental to overcoming the limitations of an exclusively technical approach to education. These competencies are not only essential for effective classroom management but also for fostering an emotional connection with students, especially in a post-COVID context where social skills have been impacted. (López *et al.*, 2021)

Guerra (2019) argues that soft skills represent a growing necessity at specific levels of education: secondary and higher education. However, this study focuses on higher education as it represents the closest stage between theory and practice in the labor market, and it is the phase in which most individuals finally develop their own life perspective.

From an educational perspective that values soft skills, university training is considered to go beyond mere job preparation, linking professional growth with personal development.

The authors' motivations for studying soft skills in the context of higher education include analyzing the challenges faced by pre-service language teachers in developing these skills, identifying their perceptions regarding these

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competencies, and determining which are most valued and promoted within the PINE program at ULEAM.

This article addresses the following scientific research questions:

- What are the main contemporary challenges faced by PINE pre-service teachers in developing soft skills?

- Which competencies should be prioritized to address these challenges effectively?

- Which soft skills are most valued and developed by pre-service teachers in the PINE program at ULEAM?

2.- Literature Review

Soft Skills

Competencies can be classified into two main categories: hard skills, which relate to technical and specific abilities, and soft skills, which pertain to the emotional, social, and communicative domains of individuals (Olivares, 2007).

While hard skills have historically been the focus of educational and labor systems, there has been a growing recognition in recent years of the value of soft skills, especially in an increasingly interconnected world that depends on interdisciplinary collaboration.

Understanding the origin and importance of soft skills highlights how these abilities contribute to better interpersonal relationship management and more balanced performance in complex environments. Skills such as empathy, effective communication, and critical thinking transcend technical barriers, becoming a distinguishing factor in both academic and professional contexts. (Astudillo, 2024)

The development of soft skills not only enriches interpersonal interaction but also fosters personal growth. These abilities directly influence the capacity to face adversities and solve problems creatively and assertively—key aspects of comprehensive human development. According to the Ayrton Senna Institute (2022), these skills enable individuals to manage emotions, set goals, make decisions, and work collaboratively to resolve conflicts, thereby strengthening emotional intelligence and resilience.

Soft Skills in Secondary and Higher Education

The current educational system faces the challenge of shaping citizens who are not only technically competent but also socially and emotionally skilled. In this sense, higher education must adopt a comprehensive approach that incorporates soft skills as an essential element of the curriculum. Guerra-Báez (2019) asserts that education should foster spaces for critical thinking and multicultural interaction, recognizing diversity as a rich source of learning.

Gómez-Gamero (2019) emphasizes that, within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, machines are replacing routine tasks, thereby elevating the importance of human abilities such as creativity, empathy, and adaptability, which are considered irreplaceable. According to the author, these soft skills provide a competitive edge in a labor market increasingly defined by the ability to collaborate, innovate, and lead teams effectively.

Although traditionally socio-emotional skills are considered inherent to personality, recent studies demonstrate that these competencies can be developed throughout life. Busso et al. (2012) argue that the educational context is key to this development, as it offers a structured environment where such skills can be systematically experienced, practiced, and reinforced.

Teachers' Soft Skills in English Language Training

The enhancement of soft skills is as essential as technical skills in training English language teachers. This involves developing abilities in communication, critical thinking, continuous learning, information technology, collaborative work, leadership, and ethics. According to Salih (2020), teacher training programs must integrate these competencies to improve graduates' employability in the 21st century.

The role of the teacher in English language instruction extends beyond the transmission of linguistic content; they must act as facilitators of learning, promoting an environment that nurtures both technical competencies and soft skills. Singer et al. (2009) highlight that these skills are essential not only for language learning but also for preparing students to meet the challenges of a globalized world.

This approach positions teachers as key agents in the comprehensive education of students, capable of modeling the socio-emotional competencies crucial for their personal and professional development.

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Bondar and Konovalenko (2024) also emphasize the importance of skills such as creativity, collaboration, and communication, noting that interactive methods such as problem-based learning, case studies, and games are effective for their development.

Astudillo (2024) argues that soft skills not only enhance employability but also facilitate adaptation to diverse contexts and creative problem-solving. Gamification and collaborative projects cited in the results align with what Konovalenko and Goncharova (2018) describe, highlighting the relevance of dynamic strategies to develop these competencies in challenging educational settings.

The development of soft skills is essential for the professional preparation of future teachers, according to Konovalenko and Goncharova (2018). These competencies not only improve the organization of the educational process but also enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching. In this context, English teachers must serve as role models for socio-emotional competencies, demonstrating empathy, adaptability, and leadership.

López et al. (2021) reinforce this idea, stating that teachers who integrate soft skills into their pedagogical practice foster more autonomous, creative, and effective learning among their students, contributing to the formation of citizens prepared for global challenges.

Educational Innovations that Promote Soft Skills

Contemporary university education is undergoing a paradigm shift, transforming its role as an educational and cultural space. This process demands a comprehensive update of strategies, objectives, content, and educational technologies. According to Panfilova and Larchenko (2021), this transition reflects the need to adopt an approach of "education through life" rather than "education for life."

The educational system must move away from rigid models centered on memorization and adopt strategies that promote the comprehensive development of students. Naranjo (2019) emphasizes that incorporating educational technologies and active methodologies, such as project-based learning, can enhance both the development of technical knowledge and soft skills. This includes the use of digital platforms that allow students to collaborate in virtual

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environments, developing skills such as intercultural communication and conflict resolution in a globalized setting.

Olivares (2007) points out that technological advancements, far from replacing human interaction, should strengthen social and emotional competencies, integrating as key tools for developing a more inclusive and effective education. This combination of technological and methodological approaches ensures that students not only acquire technical knowledge but also develop the soft skills necessary to thrive in a dynamic and interconnected world.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the Socio-Critical paradigm and follows the guidelines of a mixed-method research approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques with a descriptive focus.

For data collection, a structured interview was conducted with language directors and teachers from private, public, and semi-private educational institutions in the city of Manta. Additionally, a soft skills questionnaire was applied to pre-service teachers in the PINE program at ULEAM. Both instruments were created and validated by expert educators prior to their application.

Instruments

1.   **Soft Skills Questionnaire:** The questionnaire was a structured instrument consisting of 30 questions exploring the perception and development of the respondents' soft skills. Each question was answered on a scale from 1 to 5, with the following weights: 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Almost Always), and 5 (Always). The questions assessed key aspects such as teamwork, empathy, leadership, assertive communication, decision-making, problem-solving, effective time management, adaptability, and interculturality. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the soft skills of pre-service teachers in the PINE program, evaluating their level of mastery and use of these skills, and allowing for a direct self-assessment within the academic context.

2.   **In-Depth Interviews:** In-depth interviews were used to gain a detailed and qualitative understanding of the perspectives of both directors and teachers regarding the importance, challenges, and role of soft skills in teaching.

- **Interviews with Directors**: These interviews focused on exploring directors' perceptions of the ideal teacher profile in terms of soft skills, their impact on the teaching-learning process, and institutional strategies to promote, evaluate,

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and develop these competencies. Topics included challenges, practices, and their evaluation within the educational environment.

- **Interviews with Teachers**: These interviews aimed to understand how teachers perceive and value soft skills in their professional performance, highlighting their importance in pedagogical practice, the challenges in developing them, and their impact on improving student learning.

Sample

The sample selected for this study was non-probabilistic and intentionally defined, including two groups of participants: students and teachers. The first group consisted of 148 students enrolled between the first and ninth semesters of the PINE program at the Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí during the 2024-1 academic term. Participation was voluntary, with the only requirement being enrollment in the mentioned program.

The second group included six directors and five English teachers. Participation was voluntary, with the sole requirement being employment in public, private, or semi-private institutions.

Table 1.

Sample by Gender and Educational Levels of Student Teachers.

	1°	2°	3°	4°	5°	6°	7°	8°	9°	Total
Men	19	3	2	2	1	1	2	7	8	45
Women	34	24	14	2	2	6	3	4	14	103
Total	53	27	16	4	3	7	5	11	22	148

Table 2.

Sample by Gender of School Directors and Teachers by Educational Institutions.

	Private		Public		Mixed Public-Private		Total
	Director	Teacher	Director	Teacher	Director	Teacher	
Men	1	0	1	1	1	0	4
Women	1	2	2	2	0	0	7
Total	2	2	3	3	1	0	11

Procedure

Stage 1: Preparation of Instruments and Equipment.

The necessary instruments for data collection were designed and developed,

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including questionnaires, scales, and interview guides. This process was carried out in accordance with the objectives set out in the research. Additionally, the required technical equipment, such as digital devices, was prepared, ensuring their functionality and the protection of data confidentiality.

Stage 2: Instrument Validation.

The designed instruments underwent a validation process by a panel of ten education professionals from various institutions. This process allowed for the adjustment of items and ensured the reliability and validity of the content.

Stage 3: Application of Interviews to Directors and Teachers.

Interviews were conducted with a total of 6 directors and 5 teachers in 6 educational institutions in person, using a pre-validated question guide. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was recorded with the informed consent of the participants for later transcription and analysis.

Stage 4: Application of Soft Skills Questionnaire to Student-Teachers.

A questionnaire designed to assess soft skills was applied to 148 students of the National and Foreign Languages Pedagogy program (PINE) at ULEAM. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms after obtaining approval from the program director. Participation was anonymous, voluntary, and free. Data confidentiality was ensured through specific settings on the platform and adherence to the institution's ethical standards.

Stage 5: Data Analysis.

The collected data was processed and analyzed, integrating descriptive analysis and both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Patterns, relationships, and relevant differences were identified and interpreted based on the research objectives.

Stage 7: Drafting the Final Report.

The final report incorporated the results obtained from all stages, structured into sections including methodology, results, and conclusions. This document was written according to academic standards and reviewed before approval by the relevant committees, in compliance with applicable ethical and scientific guidelines.

RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN

For the analysis of interviews conducted with principals and teachers from private and public educational institutions, the following categorical tree is applied.

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Study Phenomenon: Key Contemporary Challenges for PINE Teachers in Developing Soft Skills.

Conceptualization of the Key Contemporary Challenges for PINE Teachers

Singer et al. (2009) emphasize that soft skills, as non-cognitive competencies, are essential for both successful learning and job performance.

In the educational field, this underscores the need to align teacher training with the real demands of educational institutions. The lack of external support, such as family collaboration, and insufficient resources hinder the effective integration of soft skills into the curriculum (Astudillo, 2024).

This challenge is consistent with Guerra's (2019) perspective, which points out that current education must prioritize the development of interpersonal and adaptive skills to meet the growing demands of the labor market.

Conceptualization of Soft Skills Development for PINE Teachers

The development of soft skills in pre-service teachers is based on the need to cultivate competencies that go beyond technical knowledge, emphasizing socio-emotional learning and emotional intelligence (López et al., 2021). According to the National Soft Skills Association (2019), these include the ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and work in teams—qualities that are crucial for both professional growth and classroom interaction.

Astudillo (2024) highlights that, in the learning of English, it is essential for teachers to promote skills such as effective communication, interpersonal relationships, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These competencies can be developed through specific activities that integrate the English language as a means of interaction and reflection.

There are two groups of interviewees:

Group 1: Six principals (2) from Private Institutions, (1) from a Mixed Public-Private Institution, and (3) from Public Institutions.

Group 2: Five English language teachers (2) from Private Institutions and (3) from Public Institutions.

There are two categories analyzed:

Category 1: Practical Application of Soft Skills in the Educational Context.

Category 2: Theoretical Foundations and Planning for the Development of Soft Skills.

Research Question 1: What are the main contemporary challenges faced by pre-service PINE teachers in developing soft skills?

Table 3.

Main Contemporary Challenges Faced by PINE Student-Teachers in the Development of Soft Skills.

	Group 1	Group 2
CATEGORY 1 Practical Application of Soft Skills in the Educational Context	RI1: "…Emotional intelligence, a teacher who lacks emotional intelligence will logically lose a lot... their situation regarding leadership, creativity, initiative, among other things, are part of the challenges teachers face today."	PI1: "They struggle to speak, they even struggle with pronunciation, they have difficulty with intonation, they struggle to make themselves heard. For me, it is essential that their voice is heard."
	RM2: "Working on emotions is quite complex, especially because we all have needs in that area, and it is difficult for a teacher to teach something they don't master. What makes these topics so complex is that they are closely related to personal characteristics."	PM2: "The teacher's challenge is living with the kids who teach us every day. What we don't want are robotic beings who simply memorize and don't learn to disagree, to say I don't agree, or I think that, or I believe that..."
	RP3: "In previous years, the acquisition of knowledge was considered, and the Ministry of Education would train us, but there was no focus on the development of soft skills. So, it is a challenge for us to try to implement them. It involves a whole field of	PP3: "Well, I believe that today, perhaps, it is a challenge to work on soft skills in different contexts. The school I came from had no motivation for this topic, but in the school I'm at now, I see the initiative to work on being, how to teach

	information, first experimentation, then modeling, and support..."	young people to solve problems, how they socialize, and to have leadership..."
	RR4: "The teaching-learning process is always a challenge because with each new school year, we see more difficulties and challenges, as there will always be students with difficulties. It is our duty to develop the appropriate skills so that they can learn, because not all students learn at the same pace or in the same way... A crucial factor is the environment, as some children come from dysfunctional homes, and because of this, challenges sometimes arise when preparing students in soft skills."	PR4: "One of the biggest challenges is understanding today's youth, where parents do not collaborate or do not understand them. As teachers, developing empathetic listening is a great challenge we face."

The analysis of the responses reveals that both the school administrators and the teacher trainees recognize the importance of soft skills for improving the educational process.

These skills not only foster a positive learning environment but also promote the personal and social development of both students and teachers. Among the most emphasized skills are: effective communication and active listening, teamwork, leadership, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence development, empathy, and conflict resolution.

This is also reflected in the works of Singer et al. (2009) and López et al. (2021), who argue that teachers need to be models of socio-emotional competencies, demonstrating empathy, adaptability, and leadership.

The implementation of these competencies in the curriculum is seen as a key need to prepare students for the challenges of the real world.

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Naranjo (2019) states that the curriculum needs to transition from rigid models focused on memorization to dynamic strategies such as active methodologies and project-based learning.

The main challenges mentioned include teacher preparation and training, as there is a gap between the training provided by the Ministry of Education and the actual needs of institutions, especially in private contexts.

The lack of external support, such as family collaboration, limits the application of values and skills learned in the classroom. The Ayrton Senna Institute (2022) supports the idea that these skills should not only be promoted in the classroom but also in family environments for a more sustained impact.

The emotional complexity of students, particularly after the pandemic, has caused young people to exhibit shyness and a lack of social skills due to isolation, making it difficult to incorporate soft skills in a transversal and balanced way within the curriculum.

Astudillo (2024) and Busso et al. (2012) emphasize that structured educational experiences can help students overcome emotional difficulties resulting from isolation and lack of social interaction.

Research Question 2: What competencies should be prioritized to effectively face these challenges?

Table 4. *Soft skills that should be prioritized to face contemporary challenges.*

	Group 1	Group 2
CATEGORY 2 Theoretical foundations and planning for the development of soft skills.	RI1.1 "We have applied robotics that works with the model of soft skills, meaning that when they work in teams, they must show patience, leadership, teamwork, synchronization, attention to detail, creativity, innovation, and all in one entity... this is done through a constructivist pedagogical model."	PI1.7 "Social skills such as teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving... if I see that the student is making an effort, we need to give them an opportunity and not be so rigid, always keeping in mind that the goal is for them to learn."

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	RI1.4 "The strategies within the curricular planning include a teacher evaluation form, which must promote values and participatory activities because it is part of our teacher evaluation. So, as the teacher knows the steps to follow in their class, the soft skills are established there."	PM1 "…The use of Kolb's cycle and STEAM has allowed students to learn actively by applying the English language through projects and skills such as collaborative work, leadership, creativity, decision-making, etc."
	RM2.4 "The methodology depends on the planning... we must work on leadership through strategies such as cooperative work and learning groups, considering the context of our students... we can provide spaces to reflect on behavior and coexistence, fostering values, and promoting resilience, which is important in this educational environment with the student diversity we have today."	PP3.4 "I use active methodologies such as collaborative projects and debates to practice these skills in real contexts. I implement formative assessments with rubrics to measure both academic knowledge and the development of soft skills."
	RR4.3 "Currently, we manage 'learning networks' with first-grade and early childhood teachers, who develop skills and abilities. There are also other ministerial trainings such as the 'Educating in Family' workshops, and our focus is not only to apply it with teachers and students but also to involve the family. Within this methodological organization, we can use talks to reach students and address the problems that youth face today. The support from the DECE is crucial."	PR4.3 "To integrate soft skills into the teaching-learning process, I consider it essential to design the curriculum with specific objectives that include the development of teamwork, effective communication, and problem-solving."

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The development of soft skills in secondary education depends on an approach that combines active methodologies, curriculum adaptation, formative assessment, and a safe learning environment. However, there are challenges related to teacher training, the lack of specific resources, and institutional support.

The investigated group identifies active methodologies as another challenge, such as using Kolb's cycle and STEAM approaches to promote practical learning. Cooperative methods like dialogic gatherings and teamwork projects, activities that promote autonomy and decision-making, are also mentioned. This is supported by Guerra-Báez (2019), who highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that promotes social and emotional skills, recognizing their relevance in the holistic development of students.

Activities are designed according to the reality of the classroom, considering the specific needs of students and available resources. Soft skills enrich teaching by creating a participatory and flexible learning environment. There is consensus about the importance of soft skills in the holistic development of students. Teachers mention fostering skills such as empathy, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving through structured activities like debates, role-playing, collaborative projects, and gamification, using active methodologies adapted to the context and practical projects with continuous assessment through the use of rubrics, recordings, and feedback to evaluate skills. Active participation and group work are emphasized, with a focus on collaborative learning.

The use of technology is a tool to motivate and teach, alongside gamification adapted to the individual needs of students, linking learning to practical and meaningful situations. Olivares (2007) emphasizes that technological advancements strengthen social and emotional competencies when used appropriately.

Research Question 3: What soft skills are most valued and developed by teacher trainees in the PINE program at ULEAM?

Table 5. *Soft Skills Questionnaire Applied to Teacher Trainees in the PINE Program.*

Soft Skills	1 Never	2 Almost never	3 Sometimes	4 Almost always	5 Always
Teamwork	0.7%	8,2%	39%	37,7%	14,4%
Leadership	2,7%	6,2%	37,7%	32,9%	20,5%

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Empathy	1,4%	6,8%	30,8%	36,3%	24,7%
Assertive Communication	0%	4,1%	51,4%	35,6%	8,9%
Problem Solving	0,7%	6,8%	55,5%	32,9%	4,1%
Effective Time Management	0,7%	12,3%	38,4%	37%	11,6%
Adaptability	0%	1,4%	17,8%	44,5%	36,3%
Decision Making	0%	3,4%	23,3%	37,7%	35,6%
Interculturality	0,7%	2,1%	16,4%	37,7%	43,2%

The study shows that pre-service teachers perceive greater preparation in skills such as interculturality, adaptability, and decision-making. This finding aligns with the literature highlighting the importance of adaptability and empathy in a globalized and diverse educational environment. According to Gómez-Gamero (2019), skills such as adaptability are essential in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where the ability to adjust to different contexts and situations becomes an added value.

Moreover, interculturality is a crucial skill in higher education, promoting interaction and enriched learning in diverse environments. (Guerra-Báez, 2019)

On the other hand, decision-making is closely linked to the development of emotional intelligence and resilience, skills that the Instituto Ayrton Senna (2022) highlights as essential to face challenges and make decisions under pressure. This underscores how these soft skills align with the comprehensive training of teachers, who must be prepared to lead and adapt to different situations in the classroom.

Regarding assertive communication and problem-solving skills, pre-service teachers report more limited development in these areas. This may reflect a lack of continuous practice and institutional support to strengthen these competencies.

According to López et al. (2021), teachers must integrate soft skills such as effective communication into their pedagogical practice to foster autonomous and creative learning. The lack of practical training in these aspects could be a factor

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limiting the development of assertive communication, which is crucial for both interaction with students and conflict resolution in the classroom.

Regarding problem-solving, the literature also suggests that these skills are not innate but can be developed within the educational context (Busso et al., 2012). However, the lack of strategies and adequate tools to address problems creatively and assertively may explain the low level of development perceived by pre-service teachers. Naranjo (2019) emphasizes the importance of educational innovations and active methodologies to foster problem-solving.

CONCLUSIONES Y RECOMENDACIONES

Throughout history, education has been a human activity that has not undergone significant or decisive changes. The so-called "innovations" in this field are often mere contemporary embellishments to pre-existing formulas, structures, and procedures. Therefore, true innovation in the educational system must originate from questioning the most basic concepts of Pedagogy and educational systems.

In this regard, Philosophy becomes a fundamental tool for understanding and discussing key topics such as the genesis, usefulness, objectives, sources, and principles of education.

Only by attempting to answer the questions derived from these topics can genuine innovation be achieved. If these precepts are not deeply understood, it is impossible to grasp Pedagogy as a science, and, consequently, true innovation cannot occur.

Throughout this research, the idea is reaffirmed that both teachers and administrators in public and private secondary education institutions focus their teaching-learning processes on cognitive knowledge, neglecting essential factors for professional development, such as soft skills.

These skills, instead of being treated as key competencies, are perceived as mere "decorations" in pedagogical practices or as extracurricular activities. Therefore, this research proposes the integration of soft skills into the Ecuadorian education curriculum, paving the way for a new era in which secondary education prioritizes soft skills as the central axis of educational development.

Comparing the results obtained with previous research, a general consensus on the relevance of soft skills for teachers is observed. However, the reviewed studies

suggest that, despite their importance, implementing effective strategies for developing these skills remains a challenge.

The discrepancy in integrating these competencies into curricula and the lack of adequate resources to strengthen them are recurring issues shared by many studies in the field.

Future research should delve into how higher education institutions can transform their teacher training programs to comprehensively include these skills.

It is recommended to explore the impact of specific interventions, such as professional development programs and continuous training in soft skills, and how these can improve educational quality and student satisfaction in the classroom.

Finally, although this study provides valuable insight into the state of soft skills in teacher training, some methodological limitations must be considered. The sample of teachers analyzed may not reflect the full diversity of educational contexts in the region, which could influence the generalization of the results.

Nonetheless, the findings are still valid as they are based on a rigorous methodology that included both interviews and surveys, which allowed for a comprehensive view of the situation.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the idea that soft skills should be a priority in initial teacher training. These skills represent a challenge in educational practice, as they require appropriate personal preparation to be effectively applied in the professional field.

While teachers recognize the importance of these competencies, they still require greater institutional support, adequate resources, and practical training to integrate them effectively.

Educational institutions have the responsibility to offer programs that structurally include these competencies, ensuring that future educators not only master their technical discipline but also the emotional and social skills necessary to face the challenges of the classroom in the 21st century.

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