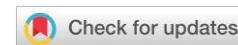




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Perception of students on the skills of teachers of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the National University of Caaguazú, year 2023

Percepción de los estudiantes sobre las competencias de los docentes de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud de la Universidad Nacional de Caaguazú, año 2023

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Abstract

One of the main gaps in knowledge within higher education in Paraguay refers to teaching competencies, this is essential to guarantee quality education. The objective of this descriptive study is to present the students' perception of the competencies of the teachers of the Faculty of Health Sciences of the National University of Caaguazú, year 2023, all active students in 2023 were included, excluding who did not want to participate in it. The variables analyzed were didactic, methodological and humanistic competencies, using a questionnaire with a Likert scale validated in 2018. The data was collected using Google Forms, processed in Excel and analyzed with Stata 16.0. The results were that the university students of the Faculty of Health Sciences perceived that their teachers have didactic and methodological skills, although there is certain weakness in humanistic skills.

Keywords: University, professional education, health education.

Resumen

Una de las principales brechas en el conocimiento dentro de la educación superior en Paraguay se refiere a las competencias docentes, esto es esencial para garantizar una educación de calidad. El presente estudio descriptivo tiene como objetivo dar a conocer la percepción de los estudiantes sobre las competencias de los docentes de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud de la Universidad Nacional de Caaguazú, año 2023, se incluyeron todos los estudiantes activos en 2023, excluyendo a quienes no quisieron participar de la misma. Las variables analizadas fueron competencias didácticas, metodológicas y humanísticas, utilizando un cuestionario con escala Likert validado en 2018. Los datos se recolectaron mediante Google Forms, se procesaron en Excel y se analizaron con Stata 16.0. Los resultados fueron que los estudiantes universitarios de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud percibieron que sus docentes poseen competencias didácticas y metodológicas, aunque existe cierta debilidad en las competencias humanísticas.

Palabras clave: Universidad, educación profesional, educación en salud.

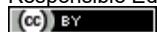
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Introduction

Higher education plays a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4, which focuses on quality education. This goal not only advocates for universal access to education but also emphasizes the importance of inclusiveness and equity in learning. By providing advanced tools and knowledge, higher education drives innovation and economic development while promoting social cohesion and global citizenship. Moreover, it prepares individuals to face contemporary challenges by fostering research and critical thinking and by equipping them with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to the world at large (Calles, 2020).

Higher education is a tool that offers individuals the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills. It facilitates the eloquent articulation of ideas and arguments, both in oral and written communication, and provides the necessary tools to understand and apply complex theories and concepts. Furthermore, it enriches individuals' perception of their environment and the global landscape. Numerous studies have confirmed that attaining an advanced level of education significantly contributes to raising a person's standard of living (United Nations, n.d.).

Didactic competencies refer to educators' ability to design and facilitate effective teaching-learning processes. The variables under study include teaching methodologies, which evaluate the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches; teacher-student interaction, which analyzes how the quality of interaction affects learning and student motivation; and assessment strategies, which examine the impact of different evaluation methods on academic performance and students' self-efficacy.

Methodological competencies involve the ability to select and apply appropriate research and teaching methods. This includes curriculum design, which analyzes how a well-structured curriculum influences learning and knowledge retention; the analysis of learning differences between approaches such as constructivism and behaviorism; and the evaluation of the impact of technological tools on the teaching-learning process.

Humanistic competencies focus on the integral development of individuals by promoting values and interpersonal skills. They emphasize the development of empathy, investigating how educational experiences influence students' ability to understand and relate to others; analyzing the role of higher education in shaping committed and responsible citizens; and examining the relationship between the educational environment and students' emotional well-being.

According to a study conducted by Cruz (2024), in recent years the training of professionals in Paraguay has shown remarkable progress, with an increase in student enrollment and advances in educational technologies based on innovative pedagogical criteria aimed at improving academic quality and promoting equitable social development. The National University of Caaguazú and its Faculty of Health Sciences are outstanding examples, offering academic programs designed to train competent professionals committed to regional development.

One of the main knowledge gaps in higher education in Paraguay concerns teaching competencies. Improving these competencies is essential to ensuring quality education and meeting students' needs. The justification for focusing on teaching competencies lies in the need to update and strengthen teachers' pedagogical and technical skills, which in turn has a positive impact on student learning and development (Mendoza, 2023). Teaching competencies in higher education in Paraguay reveal that, although significant progress has been made, challenges remain that must be addressed to guarantee quality education. Enhancing teaching competencies is essential not only to meet students' needs but also to contribute to the country's social and economic development.

The implementation of effective strategies for teachers' professional development will be key to closing these gaps and ensuring that higher education in Paraguay fulfills its mission of training competent professionals committed to the well-being of society. This descriptive study aims to present students' perceptions of the competencies of the professors at the Faculty of Health Sciences of the National University of Caaguazú, year 2023.

Methodology

A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted between June and August 2023. The population consisted of 187 students enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree programs in Nursing and Nutrition at the Faculty of Health Sciences of the National University of Caaguazú, located in Coronel Oviedo. All active students in 2023 were included in the study, while those who did not wish to participate were excluded.

The study variables were didactic, methodological, and humanistic competencies. Data were collected through a survey using a closed-ended Likert-scale questionnaire validated by Veliz in 2018. The instrument was divided into four dimensions: the first referred to general characteristics with 5 indicators; the second to teachers' didactic competencies with 10 indicators; the third to methodological competencies with 10 indicators; and the fourth to humanistic competencies with 10 indicators. The instrument was transferred to a virtual format using the "Google Forms" tool.

The data collected were entered into a pre-designed Excel spreadsheet and then coded for subsequent analysis using Stata 16.0. The results are presented in tables. To measure perception, a 4-dimension Likert-scale questionnaire was used, with response options as follows: Never (1), Almost Never (2), Sometimes (3), Almost Always (4), and Always (5). Once all data were processed, they were grouped to analyze the level of competency in the three dimensions studied: didactic, methodological, and humanistic competencies, ultimately producing a global competency level for teachers in these three areas. To determine the average and assign a rating for the level of perception students had of each teaching competency and an overall percentage, the following scale was used: Poor (0–33%), Fair (34–66%), and Good (67–100%).

The principle of justice was applied, as participation was voluntary, anonymous, and based on informed consent. The principle of autonomy was respected by informing participants that all collected information would be kept strictly confidential, ensuring be disseminated in a way that could cause harm to any

individual. The principle of beneficence was also upheld, as the research caused no harm and did not violate moral or ethical standards. The protocol was approved by the Research Unit of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Results

A total of 187 students participated in the study, most of whom were between 18 and 19 years old (35.8%), single (95.1%), female (80.7%), from urban areas (82.9%), and enrolled in the first year of their program (32.1%) (Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristics of the university students who participated in the study (n=187).

Characteristics	n (%)
Age	
18–19	67 (35.8)
20–21	54 (28.8)
22–23	34 (18.7)
24–25	25 (13.1)
26–36	7 (3.6)
Marital status	
Single	178 (95.1)
Married	3 (1.6)
Common-law union	5 (2.7)
Widowed	1 (0.6)
Sex	
Female	151 (80.7)
Male	36 (19.3)
Place of origin	
Urban	155 (82.9)
Rural	32 (17.1)
Year of study	
First	60 (32.1)
Second	51 (27.3)
Third	36 (19.2)
Fourth	25 (13.3)
Fifth	15 (8.1)

In general, according to the students' perceptions, teachers always or almost always demonstrate didactic competencies. It is noteworthy that 67.3% of students indicated that teachers promote research, and 63.1% stated that teachers conduct curriculum progress reviews (Table 2).

In terms of methodological competencies, students indicated that teachers always or almost always meet expectations. Specifically, 64.1% of students stated that teachers clearly present the skills to be developed, and 59.3% said that teachers complement

topics with readings and research assignments (Table 3).

According to students' perceptions, teachers always or almost always demonstrate humanistic competencies, particularly by valuing and respecting students' work (40.6%) and ensuring that their

presentations adhere to university standards (38.9%) (Table 4).

Overall, we can highlight that students' perception of each of the teachers' competences is positive (Table 5).

Table 2. Students' perceptions regarding teachers' didactic competencies (n=187).

Indicators	Always (%)	Almost always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Almost never (%)	Never (%)
The teacher demonstrates mastery of the subject matter in class.	111 (59.3)	49 (26.2)	20 (10.7)	7 (3.7)	0 (0)
The teacher organizes their work according to didactic stages.	103 (55.8)	60 (31.9)	23 (12.2)	1 (0.5)	0 (0)
The teacher expresses ideas clearly and is easy to understand.	101 (54.1)	55 (29.4)	30 (16.4)	1 (0.5)	0 (0)
The teacher allows students to take an active role.	95 (50.1)	56 (29.9)	30 (16.4)	1 (0.5)	0 (0)
The teacher gives engaging classes that foster interest, retention, and understanding.	99 (51.3)	61 (32.6)	23 (12.2)	2 (1.6)	2 (1.6)
The teacher promotes research.	126 (67.3)	39 (20.8)	20 (10.7)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher conducts partial evaluations of curriculum progress.	118 (63.1)	51 (27.2)	15 (8.2)	2 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher analyzes and discusses the results of academic performance evaluations.	113 (60.4)	47 (25.1)	27 (14.4)	2 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher prepares and uses up-to-date bibliographic materials.	107 (57.2)	53 (28.3)	25 (13.3)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher prepares didactic materials for activities.	113 (60.4)	47 (25.1)	27 (14.4)	2 (1.6)	1 (0.5)

Table 3. Students' perceptions regarding teachers' methodological competencies (n=187).

Indicators	Always (%)	Almost always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Almost never (%)	Never (%)
The teacher presents the skills to be developed.	120 (64.1)	47 (25.1)	18 (9.6)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher shows consistent motivation throughout the class.	96 (51.3)	61 (32.6)	25 (13.3)	5 (2.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher assesses students' prior knowledge.	97 (51.8)	57 (30.4)	27 (14.4)	4 (2.1)	1 (0.5)
The teacher uses audiovisual resources in class.	108 (57.7)	47 (25.1)	30 (15.9)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher deepens the content of the topic.	88 (46.9)	52 (27.8)	40 (21.3)	6 (3.2)	1 (0.5)
The teacher explains clearly, facilitating meaningful learning.	105 (56.1)	58 (30.9)	27 (14.4)	5 (2.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher uses techniques such as seminars, debates, and panels.	95 (50.8)	61 (32.6)	27 (14.4)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher's methodology contributes to professional training.	88 (46.9)	52 (27.8)	40 (21.3)	6 (3.2)	1 (0.5)
The teacher complements topics with readings and research work.	111 (59.3)	54 (28.8)	21 (11.2)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher evaluates skill attainment during class.	105 (55.1)	50 (26.7)	28 (14.9)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)

Table 4. Students' perception of teachers' humanistic competencies. n=187.

Indicators	Always (%)	Almost always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Almost never (%)	Never (%)
The teacher gives appropriate advice to students.	104 (55.3)	58 (30.9)	21 (11.2)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher offers closeness, active listening, and commitment to students' questions and needs.	101 (53.9)	60 (31.9)	23 (12.2)	3 (1.6)	1 (0.5)
The teacher fosters a friendly and respectful environment.	107 (57.2)	48 (25.6)	30 (15.9)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher shows charisma and enjoyment in what they do.	100 (53.4)	63 (33.6)	22 (11.7)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher demonstrates values and principles.	101 (53.9)	53 (28.3)	31 (16.5)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher shows tolerance and flexibility, offering opportunities to students.	94 (50.2)	56 (29.7)	34 (18.1)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher shares their opinion about the students to make important course decisions.	106 (56.6)	48 (25.6)	31 (16.5)	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)
The teacher values and respects students' work.	76 (40.6)	73 (38.9)	38 (20.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
The teacher's personal appearance complies with the University's standards.	76 (40.6)	73 (38.9)	38 (20.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Table 5. General perception of students regarding teachers' performance. n=187.

	Good n (%)	Fair n (%)	Poor n (%)
Teachers' didactic competences according to students' perception	155 (82.9)	31 (16.6)	1 (0.5)
Teachers' methodological competences according to students' perception	155 (82.9)	31 (16.6)	1 (0.5)
Teachers' humanistic competences according to students' perception	155 (82.9)	31 (16.6)	1 (0.5)

Discussion

University students from the Faculty of Health Sciences perceive that their teachers possess didactic and methodological competences, although there is some weakness in humanistic competences. This result is similar to that reported by Mendoza Llanos et al. (2020), in which students also mentioned the need to strengthen interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, creating a pleasant atmosphere to facilitate learning and innovation. Our results are much more encouraging than those reported by Reyes (2020), in which less than half of the students perceived teachers' competences as good.

Regarding didactic competences, students have positively highlighted their teachers' abilities, especially concerning the promotion of research. This is evidenced by students' scientific publications in journals and events, in which they have received honorable mentions. The Faculty of Health Sciences has a student research group coordinated by the Research Directorate, where published works include "*Sleep Quality in Students of the National University of Caaguazú*" and "*Adherence to the Mediterranean Diet among Staff of the National University of Caaguazú*." Thus, we emphasize that teachers' ability to integrate research into the curriculum not only enriches learning but also prepares students to contribute knowledge in their field.

In addition, regarding methodological competences, students state that their teachers complement readings with research projects. Cantillo-Muñoz (2023) identifies education as an instrument of social transformation that, when supported by research, produces relevant knowledge. Furthermore, García and García (2024) mention that teachers must

possess a certain degree of skill to progressively build research habits among students, which will allow them to be critical and proactive in their training.

Concerning humanistic competences, students aspire to be recognized and valued by their teachers. This recognition not only implies appreciation for their academic performance but also attention to their emotional and social well-being. Such an environment is crucial for creating a positive and motivating educational atmosphere. As in the study by Mendoza Llanos et al. (2020), the desire is highlighted that teachers should not only possess technical knowledge but also integrate values such as respect and empathy, thereby promoting harmonious coexistence in the classroom.

Additionally, students mentioned that teachers should improve their personal appearance. Although this aspect was not part of the variables studied, it is important to note that students mentioned the relevance of a professional image that reflects seriousness and commitment. This aligns with Cardoso and Díaz (2020), who emphasize that teachers have a significant social and moral responsibility, serving as role models since their behavior and attitude can have a significant impact on the development of young people. Therefore, it is important to improve selection mechanisms so that teachers can be good examples and inspire students to achieve their goals.

Human commitment and dedication to community service are essential for cultivating in students the values needed for the development of a fairer and more equitable society. Considering that teachers' behavior and attitude can have a significant impact on young people's development, it is crucial to improve their selection mechanisms. This will ensure that educators are good role models and inspire students to reach their goals.

For example, an evaluation process could be implemented that not only considers academic knowledge but also the teacher's ability to establish positive interpersonal relationships and their commitment to students' holistic development. This would not only benefit students but also contribute to

the creation of a more enriching and motivating educational environment.

This study presents certain limitations, such as the inability to generalize the results to a larger population. Moreover, since it is a perception study, the results may be biased. However, it reflects students' appreciation of their teachers, which can guide improvement actions.

Conclusion

This study highlights the need to adopt a holistic approach to teacher training, integrating not only didactic and methodological competences but also strengthening humanistic competences.

The results indicate that teachers are perceived positively in these areas, especially in promoting research and integrating active methodologies. However, continuous effort is required to maintain and improve these competences.

A weakness has been identified in humanistic competences, where students express the need to be recognized and valued. This aspect is essential for creating a positive educational environment conducive to learning.

Despite the favorable perception of didactic and methodological competences, the lack of attention to humanistic competences may limit students' holistic development. This poses a challenge for teacher training that must be addressed comprehensively. Students' perceptions reveal that, although teachers are competent in technical aspects, the lack of interpersonal and humanistic skills may negatively affect the educational experience. The teacher-student relationship is crucial for learning, and recognizing students' emotions and needs must be a priority.

We recommend implementing continuous professional development programs for teachers that include workshops on humanistic competences, communication skills, and empathy, and developing an evaluation system that considers not only academic performance but also teachers' ability to establish positive interpersonal relationships and their commitment to students' well-being. It is also

important to promote activities that strengthen cohesion and respect in the classroom, creating spaces where students feel valued and heard, and to include in teacher training curricula the importance of humanistic values, ensuring their integration into daily pedagogical practice.

It is essential that educational institutions recognize the importance of training teachers who are not only academically competent but also skilled in humanistic abilities. This is a call to action for education authorities to implement policies that promote a comprehensive approach to teacher training. In this way, an educational environment can be guaranteed that not only prepares students for the professional field but also contributes to their development as responsible and empathetic citizens.

Finally, we can state that the study shows that quality education must be comprehensive, addressing both technical and humanistic competences. By strengthening the latter, it will contribute to the formation of more complete professionals committed to society, capable of facing future challenges with empathy and responsibility.

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Author contributions

Carmen Analías Esquivel: Conceptualization, Research, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Validation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing. Venancia Olguín Barúa: Conceptualization, Research, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Validation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing. Gladys Rosalva López Brítez: Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Review and Editing. Mariza Diaz Gamarra: Conceptualization,

Methodology, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Review and Editing.

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