

## Article

# Nationality as an Influential Variable with Regard to the Social Skills and Academic Success of Immigrant Students

Christian Fernández-Leyva <sup>1,\*</sup> , María Tomé-Fernández <sup>2</sup>  and José Manuel Ortiz-Marcos <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Granada, 18011 Granada, Spain; jmanuel30@correo.ugr.es

<sup>2</sup> Department of Research Methods and Diagnosis in Education, Faculty of Education and Sports Sciences, University of Granada, 52005 Melilla, Spain; mariatf@ugr.es

\* Correspondence: cristianoronaldo@correo.ugr.es

**Abstract:** This study aims to expand the existing scientific, theoretical and empirical knowledge about the influence of the variables age, gender, nationality and place of residence on the probability of developing social skills that generate social wellbeing, and, in addition, to identify the relationship between the most influential variable and the academic success of immigrant students. We hope that the educational community, in an intercultural context, can benefit from and apply this knowledge to assist immigrant students. In this study, a sample of  $n = 749$  students aged between 12 and 18, of 41 different nationalities, is analyzed using the Social Skills Scale for Young Immigrants (SSSYI). Data analysis is performed with the SPSS and STATA statistical programs. Multiple linear regression (MLR) analyses verify that nationality is the most influential variable. In addition, when calculating the Pearson correlation, high and positive correlations are found between social skills, nationality and students' grades, with which academic success was measured. In conclusion, we find that students who emigrated from the European continent present better social skills, better social wellbeing and greater academic success.

**Keywords:** social skills; social wellbeing; academic success; online teaching; linear regressions



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## 1. Justification

In the last decade, the number of immigrants in Europe has increased. More specifically, this migratory flow has turned Spain into a country of great cultural diversity, especially in its southern regions [1]. This phenomenon is manifested in educational centers, significantly increasing the diversity in classrooms. Therefore, educational spaces are required that pay special attention to the social relations of the peer group, emphasizing and promoting them, in order to reduce segregation and the cultural gap [2]. Given this situation, the main purpose of this research is to expand the existing scientific knowledge on the variables that influence the development of social skills of immigrant students during online learning and to know how the most influential variable in the development of social skills of these students affects their academic success. For this purpose, the Social Skills Scale for Young Immigrants (SSSYI) was applied, an instrument that is considered a perfect candidate for assessing the social skills of young immigrants, making it the only instrument that takes into account the linguistic and comprehension peculiarities of the sample [3]. To test the influence of the variables of age, gender, nationality and place of residence on the probability of social skills development, ANOVA and regression analyses were performed on the input dataset, as these analyses are recommended for the treatment of parametric data [4]. As recommended by Campbell and Lakens [5], the ANOVA statistic was used to estimate the proportion of the variance of the observed data that can be explained by the model. To determine the rejection or acceptance of the hypothesis that the proportion of variance of the explained variables is equal to zero, the F statistic is calculated, which tests whether the null model can be rejected in favor of the full model, with all explain variables

included [6]. In the multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis, since this calculation is the one recommended by experts for the aforementioned analysis [7], social skills are used as the dependent variable and nationality, place of residence, gender, and age are used as independent variables. In addition, Pearson's correlation was applied, an analysis that indicates that when a high correlation is reached, as described in [8] the closer it is to the value of one indicates to what extent one variable is the cause of another. On the other hand, to check the behavior of the data, a descriptive analysis of the results in the degrees according to the nationalities of the immigrant students analyzed was performed, taking into account that the closer the mean degree grade is to 10, the higher the academic degree success of the students is. Furthermore, to compare the means of the participants' scores according to their nationality, Tukey's post hoc test was performed. Finally, to check which immigrants' nationalities had more social skills and which had less, and to compare it with their academic success, a contingency table comparing these variables was performed. To obtain the social skills scores, the mean of the answers given to the questionnaire was used, where scores between 1 and 2 correspond to having better social skills, and scores between 3 and 4 correspond to having worse social skills. This is because the instrument is composed of 4 response options, where 1 and 2 mean possessing a specific social skill and 3 and 4 mean not possessing it. Therefore, the lower the scores, the more social skills they possess.

## 2. Introduction

In this cultural context, it is common for the majority culture to dominate minority groups from the aspect of status and power, skewing the social welfare of the latter [9]. On the other hand, there are studies that indicate that there is heterogeneity in the results according to the nationality or nativity of the students in terms of their social skills and academic performance [10]. The culture of young immigrants due to their traditions, experiences and assimilation rates are very heterogeneous; the immigrant paradox can manifest itself differently in various groups or collectives of immigrants [11], which justifies the consideration of the nationality variable in this study. In addition, currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching methodologies of educational centers have been restructured and organized to allow for teaching online, which may have led to the deterioration of the social skills and academic success of some students [12]. Therefore, in this research, the following research question is posed: which variables are most influential in the development of the social skills of immigrant students according to the online learning methodology? In addition, and according to some studies [13] where it is shown that the lower a student's social skills are, the more they fail in school, an attempt is also made to answer a second question: Does the most influential variable (social skills) affect the academic success of these students?

### 2.1. Conceptualization: Social Skills and Academic Success

Before delving into the theoretical foundation of the work, it is necessary to explain the underlying concepts behind it.

The social wellbeing of a student is understood as the functioning of optimal psychological experiences, which favor the prevalence of positive emotions over negative ones and an adequate level of satisfaction with life. This is related to the development of social skills and personal growth, and is frequently referred to as eudaimonic well-being [14].

Social skills are one of the most important processes in the development of the individual; it is manifested through the interaction between the peer group that will allow them to obtain a healthy social life, which over time leads to certain results with different social groups such as emotional, along with meaningful communication with others [15].

Since social skills play an important role within relationships that occur in the same social context [16] Through social skills people become better relationship builders [17], and communication between people, decision-making, problem or conflict resolution, self-management, self-control and competitive skills are improved [18]. These skills are

mainly acquired in the interaction given in group and diverse environments. Authors such as Tompkins and Villaruel [19] indicate that these skills are necessary to interact with the peer group as well as with their teachers in a positive way, for example, by sharing, cooperating, and having the ability to refrain from problematic behaviors such as aggression and bullying, among others. In this sense, in intercultural settings, Hamaidi et al. [20] and Othman and Ruslan [21] argue the importance of developing social skills among all their students, which will facilitate inclusion and academic success.

In addition, [22] contextualizes it in the intercultural environment, and considers that social wellbeing can be obtained when the social and cultural skills necessary to function effectively in a diverse cultural environment are acquired. As indicated by Baeva et al. [23] the most important factor influencing social skills is the culture constituted by the environment and the family.

On the other hand, regarding academic success, this is defined as a more operational way of looking at academic performance, which is understood as the relationship between the learning process and its tangible results as predetermined values [24]. Also, academic success is understood as performance results that indicate the extent to which individuals achieve the goals and objectives in their educational environment [25]. Along the same lines, authors such as Goegan and Daniels [26] conceptualize academic success as the acquisition of knowledge, cognitive and social skills, and as general satisfaction that generates greater academic capacity and a best achievement due to experiences of academic integration and social skills.

In relation to this, some research shows that the development of positive social skills is related to better performance and therefore to a higher probability of academic success [27], which is a fundamental aspect in intercultural educational contexts [28] where social wellbeing and academic success depend on participation and social integration with the host community [29]. Also, there is evidence that shows that, in most cases, immigrant students do not achieve optimal levels of academic success [30].

Additionally, schools must guarantee the inclusion of all of their students, regardless of their cultural, ethnic or religious origin [31] since, as stated by [32], students belonging to a minority culture, upon coming into contact with the majority group, modify their coping strategies to adapt to their new sociocultural reality. On some occasions, this leads to the development of harmful or dangerous habits that require students to develop certain social skills [33]. These students avoid the impact of traumatic events that may arise in the period of cultural integration [34], which leads to the deregulation of their state of mind and school failure, as well as periods of social isolation, psychological disorder, or social conflict [35].

## *2.2. Interculturality, Social Wellbeing and Social Skills in Educational Centers*

Spain, like the entire European continent, has become an intercultural territory [36,37]. The great migratory influx has transformed the country, increasing its diversity [38] due to the introduction of different groups that follow different religions, customs and traditions [39]. Due to this 21st century phenomenon, the scientific literature has experienced a boom with regard to research focused on the social and emotional wellbeing of the immigrant population, especially with regard to the role that education has in empowering this school-age population [40].

In the presence of the cultural diversity that currently characterizes the educational context, it is considered essential to define and understand what the paradigm of interculturality consists of [41], since this concept pursues the representation of minority groups, recognizing their interests and needs [42].

According to [43], interculturality allows different social groups to enjoy equal rights in spaces of coexistence and communication. The intercultural approach implies knowing others, valuing them for who they are and fostering spaces for dialogue between all actors [44]. Opportunities for cultural mixing must be staged in educational centers so that they become a meeting place for students of different ethnicities, cultures or religions [45],

thereby allowing us to analyze and understand the realities of students and their social wellbeing from a tolerant and egalitarian perspective [46].

Thus, interculturality has special relevance in the school context in terms of the social relations of the students, emphasizing and promoting them, in order to reduce qualitative segregation [47] and, consequently, social unrest [48]. Faced with such a situation, and to achieve a recommended state of social wellbeing among students from different cultural groups, the intercultural paradigm considers the development of social skills in these students as the most important factor [49].

### *2.3. Social Skills as a Premise of the Social Welfare of Immigrant Students*

According to [50], there are important links between social skills and the social wellbeing of the individual since changes in one of these areas has an impact on the other. Therefore, authors such as [51] argue that intercultural schools should focus on ensuring that all students have equivalent educational opportunities that allow them to acquire the social skills necessary to develop adequate social welfare.

Furthermore, fostering social skills will allow the entire class group, regardless of their cultural origin, to acquire a new capacity for fairer and more equitable relationships [52]. As such, the social relations between these groups will improve [53] alongside their social wellbeing.

However, there is evidence that schools with a large influx of immigrants can lead to the development of social problems to the detriment of equal opportunities to promote the optimal development of immigrant students' social skills and social wellbeing [54]. As such, education, political, and pedagogical intervention is urgently required [55]. As [56] indicates, aspects such as students' positions in the social hierarchy of the educational center will condition the development of skills that allow them to relate optimally with their peers and, in this way, promote an adequate level of social welfare.

### *2.4. Online Teaching and Its Inference in the Social Problems of Intercultural Students*

The educational interculturality, due to globalization and migratory social movements, produced in recent decades, has been associated with important changes in the Spanish educational system [57]. This, together with connectivism and the continuous appearance of ICT applications or resources, has been motivating a shift towards an online training model associated with digital competence and technological advances [58]. This has been strengthened in Spain, by home confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has come, during this period, the only methodology used at all educational levels [59].

Through this situation, new deficiencies related to the digital and social divide of different sectors of the Spanish student population have been revealed [60]. These include the problems of connection to the Internet, the lack of technological resources, and the scarcity of training of many teachers for the didactic use of technologies as the most notable deficits [61]. This is particularly the case in minority ethnic and cultural groups, whose migratory situation positions them, in some cases, as students at risk of social exclusion [62]. This is characterized by low economic and linguistic levels that enhance the vulnerability of these groups in online teaching [63]. Given these shortcomings, in Spain it has been established to guarantee the digital inclusion of all these students, by adapting the current educational law (LOMLOE) [64], as well as with regional aid, in which laptops and tablets have been provided to the neediest students [65]. However, through this online teaching the expected educational expectations were not met, for this reason, in the second year of the pandemic, face-to-face teaching has been opted for, taking into account the health standards of social distancing, use of a mask and hand washing [66].

Given this situation, it is necessary to highlight that the educational inequalities that have been observed during online teaching have been different in percentage and severity depending on the ethnic and cultural group to which the student belongs [67].

In this sense, students of African origin have shown themselves to be the most disadvantaged, due to the socioeconomic status in which they find themselves, caused by

the poor labor regulation of their parents [68]. This, together with the parents' ignorance about the functioning of the educational system and about the language, have been closely related to the lack of adaptation to online teaching [69], which requires specific support and efforts to close the existing cultural gap between African parents and schools [70]. In addition, there are studies that show that African students perceive less family support, since they prioritize work goals and base their decisions on ease and the lower economic cost of enrollment [71]. They therefore present little expectations of academic success [72].

On the other hand, authors such as Heaslip, Hean and Parker identify the Roma ethnic group as another minority group with high deficiencies in adapting to virtual teaching [73]. In this case, in Spain, their relationship with the marginal world positions them as students with low academic performance and high levels of school absenteeism [74], aspect that has been aggravated due to the lack of resources in online teaching [75]. In addition, the scarce training and the little value that Roma parents place on their children's education have overshadowed their academic expectations [76], giving priority, as with other ethnic groups, to professional goals. Faced with these problems, there are initiatives that seek to increase the school integration of these students, as well as their academic level, a fact that is sometimes hampered by cultural roots and the discrepancy in educational values on the part of these families [77].

Another minority cultural group that has participated in online teaching in Spain have been Asian students [78]. Unlike the previous ones, in this group, no connection difficulties have been observed, although their parents' understanding of the language has. However, in this situation, above all, it has affected the socialization of Asian students, who were already characterized by having poor social skills [79]. This has been associated with few interactions in the different schools' digital media [80].

This, together with the lack of knowledge of the Spanish educational system by Asian parents [81], has made it difficult to access the minimum educational objectives [82]. For this reason, there are authors [83] who claim that social and academic support should be applied to this group, using specific theoretical and methodological tools that help social and educational integration, reducing in this way the cultural prejudices that the group faces [84].

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the group of Latin American students as another of the groups greatly affected by online teaching in Spain. This group, in which family participation in school was already scarce, has seen this situation worsened with online teaching this [85]. Nuances that especially influence adolescents, whose parents transmit messages of little academic effort to their students [86], prioritizing the world of work over the academic training of their children [87].

Although the dropout rate has decreased in recent years and the achievement gap between Hispanics and other racial groups has narrowed, Latino students continue to be the racial group with the highest dropout rate among the people aged 16 to 24 years in Spain [88]. According to studies [89] the dropout rate in secondary education is still disappointing.

For this group, as for the previous ones, it is also considered that the support programs of educational institutions play a key role in maintaining high educational aspirations and better academic performance while they are in secondary school [90].

However, these cultural references or nationalities should be considered with caution, and not extrapolated to other contexts as shown by some previous studies [91], in which, for example, it is observed that students of Asian origin achieve low levels of academic success in Spain, in contrast to the educational levels, expectations and reputation of this group in other European countries [92].

All this is due to the lack of social equity in intercultural educational contexts. Online teaching (which we currently find ourselves in the midst of due to the COVID-19 pandemic) may lead to the development new social problems that cross time-space borders, leading to situations of racial or xenophobic cyberbullying [93].

Therefore, [94] argues that this new online teaching paradigm has increased cases of cyberbullying worldwide, together with the online insecurity faced by some students due to their culture. Intolerance towards different ethnicities, races or religions has become a risk factor for victims of cyberbullying [95], which have been magnified due to the resettlement of immigrant students in segregated communities [96]. Given these circumstances, understanding these possible risk factors constitutes an important step towards addressing and developing the acquisition of the social skills necessary to deal with these issues [97]. As some studies indicate, the acquisition and development of social skills in the immigrant population facilitates greater inclusion in the educational context, increases their social wellbeing and thereby reduces intercultural social conflicts [98].

The acquisition of social skills in students (immigrant or not) helps them interpret different situations, provides them with stimuli, higher academic performance and provides them access to additional resources that promote development, such as the use of new technologies [13]. They are necessary resources in online teaching caused by the COVID\_19 pandemic [99]. And in which the implementation of new social skills that entail virtual support and companionship through digital platforms has been necessary [100].

However, not all behaviors in virtual learning have been positive. Precisely the lack of certain social skills has resulted in cyberbullying situations [101]. This has affected, in the most extreme cases, the academic performance of students [102]. Minority ethnic and cultural groups have been affected due to racist and/or xenophobic attitudes of their peer group [103].

For this reason, as reflected by Maksum, Widiana and Marini [104], it is considered necessary that all students develop social skills in academic environments with a great cultural influx, especially at a time when online teaching is gaining great relevance in educational centers. And in which it is intended, through it, to develop inclusive environments that allow students to learn about local and foreign cultures, and encourage them to develop a sense of heritage and cultural identity [105], and to share them with people who have different backgrounds.

This intracultural online learning will promote values and behaviors, which in turn will improve social skills related to communication, discussion, self-efficacy, and academic performance in online teaching [106] and will help with the use of digital media as a way of learning intercultural communication [107] skills.

### *2.5. Social Skills and Academic Success in Immigrant Students*

On the other hand, authors such as [108] equate the optimal development of social skills with academic success. However, this development is affected by variables such as nationality, gender, age, and place of residence.

Regarding nationality, ref. [109] concludes that native-born students have better social skills and better academic performance. Agreeing with this, ref. [110] indicates that immigrant students present lower academic measures when suffering from the impact of adaptation to a new context. Their integration in the host country significantly affects the development of these skills [111].

Furthermore, research links the better development of social skills to female students [112]. This coincides with another study, where it was found that male students were competing with a greater number of social conflicts, less control of their emotions and motivations, and higher rates of academic failure than their female counterparts [113].

Alternatively, some research indicates that, as students grow, the development of certain social skills improves and, with these skills, their academic success also improves due to their maturity [114]. Moreover, several studies affirm that higher levels of education, which are achieved at an older age, lead to greater social wellbeing, indicating the development of better social skills [115]. In addition, it has been found that, as they age, individuals feel happier and more satisfied with their lives and therefore present higher levels of social and psychological wellbeing [116].

However, no studies have been found that relate students' place of residence to the development of social skills. However, one investigation showed that, in places of residence where a greater number of their compatriots live, the adaptation of immigrant students improves, and with this, the time taken to achieve academic success is reduced [117].

### 2.6. Theoretical Foundations of the Instrument Used

Therefore, it is necessary to mention the value and novelty of the research, since it measures, for the first time, the acquisition of social skills and academic success among immigrant students in digitized educational contexts in which the social problems of intercultural students are emphasized [118].

This study uses an adapted and validated instrument, called the Social Ability Scale for Young Immigrants (SSYI) [119], made up of six dimensions that evaluate the following aspects: the ability to know how to say no and end interactions; self-expression in situations related to social rights; defense of one's own rights; the ability to express anger and disagreement; the ability to make requests; and the ability to know how to initiate interactions with the opposite sex.

The first dimension measures the ability to say no and end interactions since, as indicated by [120], immigrants who do not acquire this skill experience lower levels of sociability and frustration, unlike immigrants who do acquire it, who are able to adapt to the prevailing levels of sociability in their destination country. The second dimension, self-expression in social situations, consists of the ability for self-expression, which allows immigrant students to express themselves in the broader community, and, in turn, acquire and develop their social skills in a way that is appropriate in the host environment [121]. The third dimension encompasses the defense of one's rights. This dimension consists of students defending their rights to access free education, medical care, the world of work, and, in addition, being recognized by the host society, which must make a greater effort to improve the quality of life of immigrants [122].

As for the fourth dimension, expression of anger or disagreement, this concerns the ability of students to express their emotions in increasingly complex situations, since it allows them to regulate themselves in different situations that can lead to anger, as this is a prerequisite to being able to function as a member of society [123].

The fifth dimension consists of the ability to make requests, which is related to the research of [124], who refers to the ability to make requests of other people, which makes it possible to solve immediate and future problems and allows for greater social skills acquisition.

The sixth and final dimension involves initiating positive interactions with the opposite sex. According to [125], this dimension leads immigrant students to interact with friends of the opposite sex in order to improve their capacity to relate to other members of society. This can be accomplished by interactions based on trust, reciprocity, mutual support, and friendly relationships between the sexes.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Objectives and Hypothesis

In order to answer the question: Does the most influential variable of the social skills affect the academic success of these students? the following general objectives are proposed:

1. Expand the existing scientific knowledge regarding the variables influencing the development of social skills of immigrant students during online learning.
2. Know how the most influential variable in the development of social skills of these students affects their academic success.

The review of the scientific literature shows the importance of this study and lays the foundations for the initial hypotheses raised: The first hypothesis determines that nationality is the most influential variable analyzed in the acquisition of social skills of immigrant students during online teaching. And the second hypothesis is that in an online

learning context, students who belong to a nationality with higher social skills will have greater academic success.

### 3.2. Sample

This research was planned with an ex post facto quasi-experimental design, in which a sample of  $n = 749$  immigrant students between 12 and 18 years old participated ( $X = 14.17$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ), of which 397 (53%) belonged to the female gender and 352 (47%) to the male. The selection of the sample was carried out by means of intentional non-probabilistic sampling in which students at collaborating schools who wished to participate were able to do so. Despite this, the sample is sufficiently representative, exceeding the ratio of 10:1 (participants vs. items of the instrument) [126].

In addition, the participants resided in 10 different cities located in southern Spain (Table 1). These cities were selected since they are the ones that reflect a higher rate of immigrant students per school ratio [127].

**Table 1.** Percentage of number of students by place of residence.

Place of Residence	%	Participants
Granada	34.8	261
Cádiz	13.6	102
Málaga	11.5	86
Almería	10.3	77
Huelva	8.7	65
Ceuta	4.7	35
Melilla	4.5	34
Jaén	4.3	32
Córdoba	3.9	29
Sevilla	3.7	28
Total	100	749

Source: own calculations.

Regarding their origin, 238 (31.8%) immigrant students came from the African continent, 216 (28.8%) from the European continent, 177 (23.6%) from the American continent, and 118 (15.8%) from the Asian continent (Table 2). The distributions of the countries of origin of immigrant students are shown in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Distribution of the continents of origin of the immigrant students.

Continent	N°	%
Africa	238	31.8
Europe	216	28.8
America	177	23.6
Asia	118	15.8

Source: own calculations.

### 3.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this research, the Social Skills Scale for Young Immigrants (SSSYI), has a psychometric structure that presents excellent values [128] and has a global internal consistency level of 0.82 and levels above 0.81 for each of its dimensions (Table 4).

**Table 3.** Distribution of the nationalities of immigrant students.

Continent	Nationality	N°	%
Africa	Morocco	145	60.9
	Senegal	25	10.5
	Nigeria	23	9.7
	Ivory Coast	18	7.5
	Mali	15	6.3
	Algeria	10	4.2
	Guinea	2	0.9
Europe	Romania	149	69
	Germany	13	6.15
	France	11	5
	Portugal	11	5
	Italy	10	4.66
	England	9	4.21
	Ukraine	3	1.38
	Russia	3	1.38
	Bulgaria	1	0.46
	Greece	1	0.46
	Latvia	1	0.46
	Switzerland	1	0.46
	Sweden	1	0.46
	Poland	1	0.46
	Georgia	1	0.46
America	Ecuador	57	32.2
	Bolivia	33	18.64
	Peru	18	10.17
	Colombia	16	9.04
	Argentina	15	8.5
	Brazil	12	6.78
	Venezuela	9	5
	Mexico	9	5
	Paraguay	2	1.12
	Uruguay	2	1.12
	Cuba	1	0.56
	Honduras	1	0.56
	Dominican Rep.	1	0.56
	Chile	1	0.56
Asia	China	52	44
	Japan	41	35
	Pakistan	11	9
	Syria	9	7
	South Korea	5	4

Source: own calculations.

**Table 4.** Internal consistency of the six dimensions of the Social Skills Scale for Young Immigrants (SSSYI).

Dimensions	$\alpha$	N° Items
1. Being able to say no and end interactions	0.89	7
2. Being able to express oneself in social situations	0.81	8
3. Being able to defend one's own rights	0.81	4
4. Being able to express anger and disagreement	0.81	3
5. Being able to make requests to others	0.85	4
6. Being able to initiate positive interactions with the opposite sex	0.82	3
Total	0.82	29

Source: own calculations.

The instrument consists of 37 initial items, which were reduced to 33 items using the expert judgment technique. Next, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out in which the instrument was reduced to 29 items and, finally, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out that confirmed the previous 29 items, in which CFI values of  $n = 0.877$ , TLI values of  $n = 0.852$  and RMSEA values of 0.04 were obtained, meaning that the instrument was validated and had a high level of reliability  $\alpha = 0.82$ .

The first part of the questionnaire collected sociodemographic data regarding the selected sample, such as students' ages, gender, place of residence and nationality. Additionally, a second part made up of 29 items was divided into six dimensions: ability to say no and end interactions (seven items); self-expression in social situations (eight items); defense of one's own rights (four items), ability to express anger and disagreement (three items); ability to make requests to others (four items); and the ability to initiate positive interactions with people of the opposite sex (three items). The items were evaluated using a Likert-type scale, which measured the frequency of the statement from one to four, with one being equal to never, two equal to almost never, three equal to almost always and four equal to always.

On the other hand, the range of scores for the proposed dimensions ranged from seven to 28 for the first dimension, from eight to 32 for the second dimension, from four to 16 for the third and fifth dimensions, and from three to 12 for the fourth and sixth dimensions.

With regard to the six dimensions, the first of them, the ability to say no and end interactions, aims to assess the ability of young people to refuse to perform a task when they believe that it is not fair, since, according to [129], saying no is a method of expressing one's social skills and defending one's right to choose. The second dimension, self-expression in social situations, aims to assess the degree to which young immigrants are capable of carrying out the activities of daily life, as authors such as [130] indicate that their confidence can be analyzed in this way. [131] argues that one of the indicators of self-expression in social situations is confidence in one's own abilities. With respect to the third dimension, the defense of their own rights, this is used to detect the ability of young immigrants to demonstrate their knowledge about their own rights when they visit a public establishment. In relation to this, [132] highlights the right to security, the right to be informed, the right to be heard, the right to choose, the right to privacy and the right to compensation as fundamental for the social development of a subject [133]. The fourth dimension, expression of anger or disagreement, is identified with the ability of immigrant students to externalize their anger towards other people, which [134] defines as a negative emotional response to unfair behavior by others, also affirming that this ability is used as a shield against the harm of others. The fifth dimension is the ability to make requests, which is intended to measure the degree to which young immigrants are capable of asking for something they consider to be theirs, which forces the individual leave their internal forum and externalize a problem that they cannot solve by themselves. In this way, the individual must relate to others, putting their shyness aside [135]. The sixth and last dimension involves immigrant students' ability to initiate positive interactions with the opposite sex, through which we intended to assess whether the participants were capable of holding conversations and interacting with people of the opposite sex. In relation to this, [136] states that this ability is related to spontaneously giving a compliment, or simply being able to talk to someone who is attractive.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

For data collection in the educational centers, participation was requested by email and telephone calls to various managers. Subsequently, the parents and legal guardians of immigrant students were asked to sign an informed consent form to confirm that they consented to participate in the study. We explained that this participation would be completely anonymous and that the confidentiality of the data would be guaranteed. Regarding the administration of the questionnaire, it was provided virtually and in Spanish to students, through a link provided by their teacher in class. The instrument was completed in approx-

imately 10 to 30 min using the Google Forms platform. The help of an online translator was requested only four times by the students since most of the immigrant students surveyed were fluent in Spanish and had passed their literacy classes. The questionnaire was tested with immigrant students, and this instrument was decided to be administered in Spanish because the students had a good level of the language, which was verified by their own teachers who were sent a document to ensure that this was the case. Finally, at the end of the academic year, the teachers were asked for the final grades in each subject obtained by the students who participated in the study. These grades were sent by email to the authors of this work and represent the average of the marks obtained during the course in each of the subjects.

Both in the administration of the questionnaire and in the collection of academic qualifications, the ethical recommendations provided in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975), later updated in Brazil in 2013, were followed, and the Ethics Committee of the University of Granada approved this study (reference code: 742/CEIH/2018). We assessed the variables of nationality and gender, which, a priori, can generate controversies when related to descriptions of students' capacities. We also took into account the existing immigration policy, as reflected in the deontological code of the regulations mentioned above.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

In the tabulation and analysis of the data, the statistical program SPSS version 25 was used, following the statistical indications and data analysis techniques proposed by authors such as P [137]. Prior to this step, we carried out the coding of the independent variables. For the gender variable, the number 1 was used to code for male gender and the number 2 for female gender. For the nationality variable, the number 1 was used to refer to immigrants from the African continent, the number 2 for the continent of Europe, 3 for the Asian continent and 4 for the American continent. For the variable place of residence, the number 1 was used to code for immigrants who resided in the province of Granada, the number 2 for those who resided in the province of Malaga, 3 for Almería, 4 for Jaén, 5 for Córdoba, 6 for Cádiz, 7 for Seville, 8 for Huelva, 9 for Melilla and 10 for immigrants residing in Ceuta. Finally, regarding age coding, this was done using the ages of the students: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Following this procedure, we were left with a final data set of three nominal variables (gender, nationality and place of residence) and one ordinal variable (age). To check the probability of immigrant students developing their social skills according to the variables of age, gender, nationality and place of residence, multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis was carried out using STATA statistical software. Through this analysis, a model can be created that defines the relationship between the outcome or dependent variable (social skills) and the independent or explanatory variables [138]. Multiple linear regression (MLR) is one of the statistical methods that attempts to model the correlation between the variables involved and a response variable that depends on the linear equation in the observed data.

The MLR model is as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_p X_p + \varepsilon$$

where Y is the dependent variable,  $\beta_1$  is the intercept,  $X_1$  is the independent variable, and  $\varepsilon$  refers to random measurement errors [8].

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Data Analysis

#### MLR Model

In this study, the values for ANOVA ( $F = 4.17$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) indicated the significance of the complete model and, therefore, the validity of the model when making predictions about students' social skills, as previously shown [139] (Table 5). The  $R^2$  and the root mean square error (RMSE) of the independent variables were then calculated to check the fit of

the model and the ability of the SSSYI scale to predict social skills since, according to some theorists, this is the best analysis for this calculation [103].

**Table 5.** ANOVA results for the regression model of the age, gender, nationality and place of residence variables.

ANOVA							
Regression	Sum of squares regress	Df regress	Sum of squares residual	Mean squares regress	Mean squares residual	F	Sig.
	306.54	5	10977.39	61.31	14.70	4.17	0.001

Source: own calculations.

The multiple linear regression (MLR) analyses of the input data set for social skills obtained values of  $R = 0.888$  and  $R^2$  Adjusted = 0.787. The value of  $R^2$  indicates the percentage at which the intended instruments were measured since, according to some theorists, this is the best analysis for this calculation [140]. In the case of  $R^2$  Adjusted = 0.787, this indicates that the SSSYI measures 78.7% of social skills as a function of the nationality, place of residence, gender and age variables. The results showed that RMSE was = 0.712, indicating that the model fit scores below 0.712 correctly as, according to some studies, this indicates that the adjustment is adequate [141] (Table 6). In order to verify which of the variables (nationality, place of residence, gender or age) was the one that had the most weight in the research and, therefore, was the greatest predictor of social skills, a comparison of competing model coefficients was calculated.

**Table 6.** Results of multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis of the input data set for social skills.

R	$R^2$ Adjusted	RMSE
0.888	0.787	0.712

Source: own calculations.

The comparison of competing model coefficients was obtained with the variables with less impact, which were the place of residence (=0.242), age (=0.135) and gender (with a coefficient of = 0.04) (Table 7). Therefore, it can be deduced that social skills are linked to the nationality of the young immigrant participants to a greater degree than place of residence, age and gender. Subsequently, the correlation between the social skills, nationality and qualifications variables was corroborated by calculating the Pearson correlation, as recommended [142] (Table 8).

**Table 7.** Comparison of competing model coefficients of multiple linear regression analysis.

Comparison of Competing Models	
Place of residence	0.242
Age	0.135
Gender	0.040

Source: own calculations.

**Table 8.** Correlation between social skills, nationality and qualifications.

Pearson's Correlation	
Social Skills	Qualifications 0.937
Nationality	0.994

Source: own calculations.

The value of the mean academic scores achieved by the participants ranged between 4.33 and 9.22, with the latter being the highest. The lowest score corresponds to immigrants of Korean origin, followed by Chinese students with 4.34 and Japanese students with 4.38. On the other hand, the best marks were obtained by immigrants from Germany with 9.22, followed by the English with 8.33 and the Portuguese with 8.22. (Table 9)

**Table 9.** Descriptive statistics of the mean academic success of the students according to their nationality.

	Nationality	Mean
1	Germany	9.22
2	England	8.33
3	Portugal	8.22
4	France	8.13
5	Switzerland	8
6	Mexico	7.92
7	Uruguay	7.83
8	Italy	7.70
9	Chile	7.33
10	Cuba	7
11	Russia	7
12	Sweden	7
13	Argentina	6.90
14	Brazil	6.75
15	Paraguay	6.70
16	Venezuela	6.69
17	Bulgaria	6.67
18	Bolivia	6.54
19	Peru	6.50
20	Colombia	6.30
21	Ecuador	6.21
22	Ukraine	6
23	Guinea	6
24	Domin. R.	6
25	Greece	6
26	Latvia	6
27	Poland	6
28	Algeria	5.86
29	Nigeria	5.83
30	Morocco	5.76
31	Mali	5.75
32	Senegal	5.69
33	Honduras	5.33
34	Syria	5.33
35	Ivory Coast	5.25
36	Georgia	5
37	Romania	4.84
38	Pakistan	4.67
39	Japan	4.38
40	China	4.34
41	South Korea	4.33

Source: own calculations.

Tukey's post hoc test (Table 10) verified that the majority of grades had a level of significance below 0.05 and were homogeneous, except for grades 4 and 8; 4 and 9; 5 and 7; 6 and 7; 8 and 9; and 9 and 10. Significant differences were found between these grades and therefore they differed from each other due to their heterogeneity [143].

As can be seen in Table 11, the immigrant students who have better social skills are of the German, French and Portuguese nationalities, and they agree that their academic success is high, the average grade obtained during the school year being 9.22 for students of German origin, 8.22 for those of Portuguese origin and 8.13 for those of French origin. On the opposite side are the immigrant students who have the worst social skills, which are those from China, Japan and Pakistan, and they agree that their academic success is low, with the average of the grades obtained during the course being 4.67 for the students of Pakistani origin, 4.38 for those of Japanese origin and 4.34 for those of Chinese origin.

Therefore, when checking these scores, it can be observed how having better social skills is related to greater academic success.

**Table 10.** Tukey’s multiple comparison test of the means of academic success according to nationality.

Difference of Levels	Diference of Means	EE Difference	IC of 95%	Sig.
Mixture 4–Mixture 5	9.219	1.449	(4.94, 13.50)	0.000
Mixture 4–Mixture 6	12.323	1.458	(8.01, 16.63)	0.000
Mixture 4–Mixture 7	10.119	1.632	(5.30, 14.94)	0.000
Mixture 4–Mixture 8	2.166	1.800	(−3.16, 7.49)	0.893
Mixture 4–Mixture 9	−0.866	2.465	(−8.15, 6.42)	1.000
Mixture 4–Mixture 10	−15.132	5.087	(−30.17, −0.09)	0.047
Mixture 5–Mixture 6	3.105	1.034	(0.05, 6.16)	0.044
Mixture 5–Mixture 7	0.091	1.267	(−2.85, 4.65)	0.992
Mixture 5–Mixture 8	−7.052	1.478	(−11.42, −2.68)	0.000
Mixture 5–Mixture 9	−10.084	2.241	(−16.71, −3.46)	0.000
Mixture 5–Mixture 10	−24.351	4.982	(−39.08, −9.62)	0.000
Mixture 6–Mixture 7	−2.204	1.277	(−5.98, 1.57)	0.599
Mixture 6–Mixture 8	−10.157	1.487	(−14.55, −5.76)	0.000
Mixture 6–Mixture 9	−13.189	2.246	(−19.83, −6.55)	0.000
Mixture 6–Mixture 10	−27.456	4.984	(−42.19, −12.72)	0.000
Mixture 7–Mixture 8	−7.953	1.658	(−12.85, −3.05)	0.000
Mixture 7–Mixture 9	−10.985	2.363	(−17.97, −4.00)	0.000
Mixture 7–Mixture 10	−25.252	5.038	(−40.15, −10.36)	0.000
Mixture 8–Mixture 9	−3.032	2.483	(−10.37, 4.31)	0.886
Mixture 8–Mixture 10	−17.299	5.095	(−32.36, −2.24)	0.013
Mixture 9–Mixture 10	−14.267	5.366	(−30.13, 1.60)	0.110

Source: own calculations.

**Table 11.** Contingency table comparing immigrant skills with more and less social skills and their academic success.

Nacionality	More Social Skills	Academic Success
Germany	1.155	9.22
France	1.169	8.13
Portugal	1.212	8.22
Nacionality	More Social Skills	Academic Success
China	3.87	4.34
Japan	3.66	4.38
Pakistan	3.42	4.67

Source: own calculations.

## 5. Discussion

The objectives of this study consisted, on the one hand, of attempting to expand the scientific knowledge on the influence of the variables of nationality, gender, age and place of residence on the development of social skills among immigrant students, and, on the other hand, to assess the relationship between the most influential variable influencing the development of social skills and the academic success achieved by immigrant students during the online learning process (initiated due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Given this situation, it should be mentioned that the large migratory influx has transformed Europe and, more specifically, Spain [1]. Due to this 21st century phenomenon, the scientific literature has experienced a boom with regard to research focused on the social and emotional wellbeing of the immigrant population, especially with regard to the role that education has in empowering the school-age population [40]. Therefore, authors such as [41] consider the paradigm of interculturality as essential to the social and emotional wellbeing of the immigrant population, since it seeks the representation of immigrant groups or minority groups, recognizing their interests and needs in society [46].

Promoting equality and social relations between different cultural groups in educational centers seeks to reduce the existing cultural gap [54]. However, even in these contexts, it is common for the majority culture to position itself as superior to minority groups due to its status and power, to the detriment of the social welfare of immigrant students [9]. In addition, this social gap may be exacerbated by socio-economic and cultural exclusion within educational institutions [143]. This has caused an increase in segregation, leaving to cyber violence perpetrated by dominant groups [47]. Moreover, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a methodological shift occurred from face-to-face to digitized teaching, leading to an increase in the social problems of said students, even crossing the boundaries of time and space [105].

In this sense, in their study, Ref. [11] reveal that, through this new methodology, differences in access to and appropriation of technology are intensified based on the diverse cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status of the students.

Faced with such a situation, some theorists recommend that interculturality should be promoted in diverse educational contexts in order to favor the socialization of all students and thus lead them to acquire new social skills in order to achieve optimal social wellbeing [49].

Based on this, a study that looks to expand the existing scientific knowledge on the variables influencing the development of the social skills of these students is justified. Re-garding this objective, the results show that, among the variables analyzed, such as nationality, gender, age and place of residence, the nationality of immigrant students seems to have the biggest impact on their acquisition of said skills. This aspect also coincides with previous research [24] in which authors such as [143] highlighted nationality as one of the most influential factors in the development of social skills in immigrant students. According to [144], this may be due to the fact that the traditions, cultures and customs of each nationality determine the intercultural dialogue that takes place and, with it, the acquisition (or not) of certain social skills [39].

On the other hand, and taking into account the second objective of this research, the results obtained show that the social skills of the immigrant students analyzed have a positive correlation with the academic qualifications they achieved. This is in agreement with another study showing that the development of positive social skills is related to better academic performance, and, therefore, to a higher probability of academic success [121].

The results obtained also reflect the positive correlation between the nationality variable, the variable that most influences the social skills of these students, and their grades, which are considered a reflection of their academic success. In the analyses of the nationality variable, it is revealed that the highest level of academic success is indicated in students of European origin, such as those from Germany, England or Portugal, while the students who obtained lower grades and, therefore, less academic success, were students from China, Japan and South Korea. These results coincide with previous research [122], where it was identified that, depending on the students' nationality, a different degree of integration is achieved in the host country, which significantly influences their academic performance and success.

The findings cannot be extrapolated to the entire Spanish context, and the reason for this lies in the peculiarities of the analyzed region, where there is a lower representation of the nationality of some immigrants than in other areas of the country. This means that the results obtained should be considered with caution, although the sample selection meets statistical requirements established by Williams-Washington and Mills [145], where it is known that the participant-element ratio must be at least 10: 1.

## 6. Conclusions

We believe that our findings confirm each of the hypotheses discussed in this study. Firstly, we found that the nationality of the evaluated students is the most influential variable in the development of their social skills and, therefore, their social wellbeing.

On the other hand, and taking into account the second hypothesis raised, the results obtained show that the social skills of the analyzed students have a positive correlation with the academic grades they achieved. Additionally, the same positive correlation also occurs between the nationality variable and the academic success of the studied students.

More specifically, this study shows that students of European origin show a greater development of their social skills and greater academic success.

These data exemplify the need for educational and family projects that focus on the development of social skills in immigrant students in order to improve not only their social wellbeing, but also their academic success. Therefore, educational centers must generate awareness of this issue and develop prevention and intervention actions that favor the inclusion of all students, and in which xenophobic values towards cultural diversity are avoided and the coexistence of responsible citizens is promoted.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the findings obtained in this study revealed that the SSSYI scale, used to measure the data, correctly predicts the social skills of young immigrants based on their nationality, gender, age and place of residence.

## 7. Limitations

The study has several limitations that require consideration when interpreting the findings. This research used a quantitative methodology, which can provide limited information regarding the social skills, social wellbeing and academic success of immigrant students. Therefore, it is recommended that the study be expanded via investigations that collect qualitative data in order to provide complementary information to accompany the current findings.

In addition, another of the main limitations of the study is related to the research itself. Although representative, it is limited to immigrant students from southern Spain. Therefore, extrapolation of the data must be carried out with caution.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes to expanding the existing scientific knowledge on the social skills of immigrant students in online learning settings. Additionally, educational specialists should consider our findings in order to make prevention and intervention decisions that improve said skills and, consequently, the social wellbeing and academic success of these students. At present, it is undeniable that the research conducted in this study is highly relevant if one takes into account the constant migratory growth of educational centers and the increase in racist and xenophobic cyber violence.

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