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Human development: social imaginaries from university students

Desarrollo humano: imaginarios sociales desde los estudiantes universitarios

Desenvolvimento humano: imaginários sociais de estudantes universitários

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ABSTRACT

There are various concepts about human development and each concept assumes certain indicators to establish the human development index. Most of the concepts have an economic connotation, which is far from the meaning that university students give to human development. This research aims to reveal the social imaginaries of the students of the National University "Hermilio Valdizán" of Huánuco, Peru, about human development. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm, qualitative methodology perspective and hermeneutic phenomenological method were assumed. The information was collected through in-depth interviews with 16 students of the aforementioned university and was processed using Atlas Ti 9.1. The findings are presented in the following categories: conception of human development, conception of quality of life, components of human development, perception of the human development index, does the human development index reflect the quality of life of people?, proposals for new indicators for human development. It is concluded that it is necessary to update the indicators of human development.

Keywords: university; human development; well-being; university students; quality of life.

RESUMEN

Existen diversos conceptos sobre el desarrollo humano y cada concepto asume determinados indicadores para establecer el índice de desarrollo humano. La mayoría de los conceptos tienen connotación economicista, los mismos que distan del significado que le otorgan al desarrollo humano los estudiantes universitarios. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo develar los imaginarios sociales de los estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional "Hermilio Valdizán" de Huánuco, Perú, acerca del desarrollo humano. Por ello se asumió el paradigma interpretativo, perspectiva metodológica cualitativa y método fenomenológico hermenéutico. La información

se recogió a través de la entrevista a profundidad a 16 estudiantes de la mencionada universidad y se procesó usando el Atlas Ti 9.1. Los hallazgos se presentan en las siguientes categorías: concepción sobre el desarrollo humano, concepción de calidad de vida, componentes del desarrollo humano, percepción sobre del índice de desarrollo humano, ¿el índice de desarrollo humano refleja la calidad de vida de las personas?, propuestas de nuevos indicadores para el desarrollo humano. Se concluye que es necesario actualizar los indicadores del desarrollo humano.

Palabras clave: universidad; desarrollo humano; bienestar; universitarios; calidad de vida.

RESUMO

Há vários conceitos de desenvolvimento humano e cada conceito pressupõe determinados indicadores para estabelecer o índice de desenvolvimento humano. A maioria dos conceitos tem uma conotação econômica, o que está longe do significado dado ao desenvolvimento humano pelos estudantes universitários. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo desvendar os imaginários sociais dos estudantes da Universidade Nacional "Hermilio Valdizán" de Huánuco, Peru, sobre o desenvolvimento humano. Para isso, foram utilizados o paradigma interpretativo, a perspectiva da metodologia qualitativa e o método fenomenológico hermenêutico. As informações foram coletadas por meio de entrevistas em profundidade com 16 alunos da referida universidade e processadas com o Atlas Ti 9.1. Os resultados são apresentados nas seguintes categorias: concepção de desenvolvimento humano, concepção de qualidade de vida, componentes do desenvolvimento humano, percepção do índice de desenvolvimento humano, o índice de desenvolvimento humano reflete a qualidade de vida das pessoas?, propostas de novos indicadores para o desenvolvimento humano. Conclui-se que os indicadores de

desenvolvimento humano precisam ser atualizados.

Palavras-chave: universidade; desenvolvimento humano; bem-estar; estudantes universitários; qualidade de vida.

INTRODUCTION

It is common sense that all human beings strive for human development, but what does human development mean? How is human development measured? These are questions that lead to different, even divergent, answers.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1990) conceives human development as "a process through which people's opportunities are expanded; these opportunities are: (...) a long and healthy life, access to education and having the resources to enjoy a decent standard of living" (p. 33). This concept received a set of criticisms. Correa Mautz (2020) considers that the concept has a lot of economic connotations, since the UNDP assumes that the economy is the end and a means for human development, not understanding human development as a development of the human being.

Batista (2006) also does not share the UNDP's concept of human development, stating that human development "is much more than simply increasing or decreasing personal and national income; it means creating an environment in which people can fully realize their potential and live productively and creatively, according to their interests and needs" (p. 29). Human development is the acquisition of capacities that strengthen different skills and abilities in people, in such a way that they follow their own paths to lead a full life with greater freedoms, it is the extension of the real freedoms enjoyed by individuals, eliminating poverty and tyranny (Challú, 2023).

In relation to how university students conceive human development and what the reality of human development is, research has been carried out in various universities around the world. In Colombia, Ramos Baquero (2011) presents a reflection on the elements that should be considered in the commitment to human development in the University; he states that "the major issues of development cannot be just a discourse projected in time, they must have a clear intentionality that involves the present of the subjects that are part of this collective that we call University" (p. 41).

In Chile, Bicocca (2018) analyzes the problems of university education and considers that there are obstacles to promoting the human development of students, hence he proposes rethinking the problem from the capabilities approach. He specifies the conceptual background and principles of the capabilities approach, evaluates the educational potential of the approach to promote human development and proposes curricular integration to guarantee human development at the university.

Benhumea Rodríguez *et al.* (2020) develop a case study at the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico on the operation of the human development paradigm that is explicitly declared at this university. The professional competencies declared in the plans of 53 study programs were analyzed, managing to identify capacities linked to human development that are promoted through professional competencies. Finally, they propose to add certain aspects that contribute to human development in students.

At the "Hermilio Valdizán" University in Huánuco, Peru, no studies have been conducted that explore in depth the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of people in relation to human development; that is, the social imaginaries of university students were not studied. Social imaginaries are sets of images, symbols and narratives that a society shares and that give meaning to its reality. Analyzing these imaginaries among university students allows us to understand how they conceptualize human

development and what indicators they associate with it.

Studying the social imaginaries of university students regarding human development is important because it allows us to reveal their knowledge, problems, myths and stereotypes, which is essential for adapting educational programs and policies to be undertaken.

Social imaginaries influence how people interpret and respond to various situations. Knowing the ideas that students have about human development helps predict their behaviors and decisions in their personal and professional lives; it allows the design of educational interventions, since education is a process that must adapt to the needs and contexts of students; it allows the design of more effective and relevant curricula and pedagogical strategies, which directly address students' perceptions and needs. By identifying imaginaries, educators can promote critical and reflective thinking among students about the imaginaries. This helps them question and analyze their own beliefs and attitudes, contributing to their integral development.

In summary, studying the social imaginaries of university students about human development is vital to better understand their problems, perceptions and attitudes, design effective educational interventions, promote critical thinking and develop policies and programs that respond to their specific needs and challenges, hence the objective of the research is to reveal the social imaginaries of students from the National University "Hermilio Valdizán" of Huánuco, Peru, about human development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The work was guided by the interpretive paradigm, which studies human behavior, since it is based on the description and understanding of the reality of specific objectives to be studied in depth. It conceives that there is no quantifiable truth, each human being interprets

reality according to his inclinations, opinions and his interrelations with others. In other words, this paradigm seeks to interpret and understand information and replaces measurement and empirical verification with the understanding of that reality, making use of various methods: interviews, surveys, life stories, field notebooks, etc. It does not seek to generalize the results, but to understand a particular situation.

The methodological perspective used in the work is qualitative research, because it is based on understanding and deepening the phenomena to analyze them according to their reality and what surrounds them, whether individuals or several groups, in order to know how they perceive their reality.

The research was guided by the hermeneutic phenomenological method, which bases its studies on the subject's perspective, as well as his behavior, how he expresses himself, his ideologies, etc. This method is interested in the study of reality, of what surrounds the human being, in the meaning of the daily manifestations that people experience, in the sense and importance that these have; it is expressed and based on the subject's ideologies.

The sampling used was purposeful, because it allowed us to choose who would be part of the research, considering 16 university students who were familiar with the subject of the human development index.

The information was collected using the in-depth interview technique, which is one of the preferred techniques by qualitative researchers, since it has no limits on questions and is given directly, that is, face to face. The main objective of this technique is to obtain all the necessary information orally about opinions, experiences, among others. In this technique, the interviewee can know the purpose of the research in greater detail and if there is any doubt about a question, it can be clarified; the interviewees can be of all ages and social status and not too many materials are required, just the interview guide

and the interviewer making sure that all the questions have been answered.

The instrument that allowed the collection of information was the questionnaire; it included key or leading questions that helped obtain the information required by the research team.

RESULTS

The results of the research are presented in the following categories: conception of human development, conception of quality of life, components of human development, perception of the human development index, does the human development index reflect the quality of life of people? proposals for new indicators for human development.

Conception of human development

Everyone agrees on human development, but there is no consensus on its meaning. For some students at the National University "Hermilio Valdizán" it means satisfaction of basic needs, for others it means quality of life and there are those who associate it with physical development.

Those who consider human development to be the satisfaction of basic needs express: "Human development is when a person can satisfy their basic needs, such as: health, education and has enough money to cover their personal and family expenses" (EU2); "It is when a person or community grows in various aspects, such as education, health and food" (EU6); "To satisfy their needs and have a comfortable and full life" (EU8).

Those who link human development with quality of life state: "For me, human development is the quality of life that one has" (EU3); "It is a measure that serves to show the quality of life of people" (EU7); "It is the continuous

improvement that each society has, with better living conditions to cover their needs" (EU9).

There are students who link human development to the stages of human development. They state: "I don't have much knowledge on the subject, but I think it's when a person develops physically" (EU4); "It's what happens in the different stages of a man's life" (EU5); "It's enjoying the changes that one experiences in the different stages" (EU4); "It's what happens in the different stages of a man's life" (EU5).

In this regard, according to human development psychology, physical development follows a predictable order and depends on a variety of factors. The family has a great impact on when children go through the different stages; similarly, family values determine the amount of practice and attention that children receive in developing different skills and attitudes.

Conception of quality of life

Like human development, quality of life has meanings for university students. Most of them consider quality of life as the satisfaction of basic needs, as shown in the following expressions: "It is when you can cover the basic food basket, as well as have health, education and economy" (EU1); "It is when a person or a family has access to basic sanitation (water and sewage), as well as the payment of their expenses" (EU2); "It is being able to satisfy your basic needs, such as food, clothing, having a good job, having a health center" (EU3); "It is having well-being in all aspects such as health and education" (EU4); "It is what the person enjoys or satisfies their needs"; "It is covering sufficient basic needs, therefore, a person can feel comfortable, have access to education, health, which are essential for human well-being today" (EU9); "It is what you have when you lead a good life, having a house, a car, food, etc., which is the basics" (EU5); "It is when a person enjoys basic things, such as food and clothing, and also treats themselves to some things" (EU6).

Quality of life is a broad and subjective concept that refers to the general well-being and satisfaction that a person or a community experiences in their daily lives. While meeting basic needs is an important component of quality of life, it is not the only factor that determines it. Meeting basic needs such as food, housing, education, health and safety is essential to achieving a good quality of life. "It is also about taking care of your physical and psychological well-being" (EU3), "it is about enjoying the changes that one experiences in its different stages" (EU4), above all it is about achieving happiness, because "when you are happy you achieve quality of life" (EU1).

Components of human development

College students consider some necessary components in human development: health, self-esteem, economy and education.

The economy is a key factor in human development because it allows us to "cover the basic food basket" (EU1), which is necessary for survival. At a time when many people do not have stable jobs or receive salaries below the minimum wage, having sufficient income is an ideal; we only need to refer to what one student said: "My ideal is to have a quality education and sufficient income" (EU7).

Education is a means to escape poverty. In this sense, it is a fundamental element of human development. Human development is achieved "when a person has an education, and through this, can cover his or her expenses" (EU2). For this purpose, it is necessary that "the school or study center has all the necessary equipment" (EU1); that is, it has infrastructure, furniture, resources and educational materials in good condition, access to the Internet and, above all, it has qualified teachers.

In order to have good health, it is necessary to have adequate medical care. In this sense, a student expresses: "For me, human development is achieved when you have a good health center, where you can get good care"

(EU1). This is in contrast to the harsh reality that the majority of the population faces when they do not have equipped health centers, they are mistreated due to their low income, origin, skin color, among others. Social inequality causes people lacking economic resources to not receive the necessary medicines or care, even leading to losing their lives.

For university students, human development is achieved "when one feels good about oneself" (EU3), when one is able "to regulate one's emotions when faced with a problem" (EU5). "It is about enjoying the changes one experiences at different stages" (EU4).

Enjoying mental health is synonymous with moving forward despite adversity, which is why it is necessary to learn to regulate emotions.

Perception of the human development index

To determine the Human Development Index, the UNDP takes into consideration three essential factors of human life: health, education and economy. Less than half of the students interviewed have information on the Human Development Index established by the UNDP; therefore, they mention that human development is established by measuring the economy, education and health (EU1, EU2, EU3, EU5, EU6, EU7, EU8).

Does the Human Development Index reflect people's quality of life?

For some interviewees, the human development index adequately reflects the quality of life of people individually and collectively, since these indexes are based on three important aspects: health, education and economy.

This is what the interviewees say: Yes, "because it measures, determines and informs how we are progressing as a society, what the quality of life of the population is like" (EU9) "when we go to a remote town, we can see at a glance how they live" (EU2), "in this way we can observe the

different levels and shortcomings of a society" (EU7).

We must note that "if we measure it collectively, [the UNDP Human Development Index] is adequate, as it allows us to see the situation of individuals, a region or a certain country" (EU3). However, if we want to measure the human development of a particular person, it is not adequate. This is why several interviewees consider that the Human Development Index does not really reflect the quality of life of all people.

"Individually, no, because each one of us has different problems, with different mishaps, some may have difficulty in some index, while others do not" (EU3), "each province is different and they do not have the same conditions" (EU4) and "they do not know the reality of each one of us" (EU5), "I do not believe that they reach the depths of a country and see its poverty" (EU6).

Proposals for new indicators for human development

The university students interviewed believe that indicators should be included in the human development index. Among them, the following stand out:

- Equitable development of towns. Governments in power allocate works to cities with the largest number of inhabitants, to the detriment of those with the least population or those further away from the big cities. This situation motivates us to propose a new "indicator that takes into account... the centralism that exists in our country" (EU1).
- Mental health. Mental health is a fundamental aspect of human life and must be considered when establishing the human development index. "Yes, mental health, since after the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health illnesses have increased, since if you are not mentally stable you will be unstable when faced with other decisions that you can make

and affect other indices" (EU3). "It could be people's emotional development" (EU2).

DISCUSSION

University students associate human development with the satisfaction of basic needs, which is in line with what Villalobos (2023) says, who maintains that human development is achieved when a population achieves an improvement in the different aspects of their lives, managing to cover their basic needs. From this perspective, the human being becomes the central element of a country's development, since it is the human being who has a fundamental role in this aspect. However, the UNDP determines the human development index based on only three factors: economy, health and education (United Nations Development Program, 1990).

The human development index of countries should not be measured solely through the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but indicators that reflect the real situation of the inhabitants should be used. The measurement of development should focus on human wealth, rather than on the material wealth of people.

In relation to health, which considers life expectancy at birth, it is worth mentioning that life expectancy has increased and has generated concern about measuring how people live these years. Based on this concern, the concept of quality of life was introduced (Nogueira Pires, *et al.*, 2022). Quality of life refers to the conditions that favor a pleasant and valuable life, generating happiness for the person, basically in relation to their health (Fernández, *et al.*, 2010).

On the other hand, given that in times of uncertainty and tension, the deterioration of mental health has increased, affecting people's quality of life, it is necessary to include mental health as an indicator of human development. In this regard, Garcés-Delgado *et al.* (2022)

consider that emotional or mental development is an important factor for human development; the social, family and academic environment and personal characteristics themselves are factors that favor the acquisition of positive emotional skills or, on the contrary, detrimental to balanced cognitive and social development.

In relation to education, we must go beyond measuring the number of years of regular basic education or the average schooling attained by the inhabitants of a country; we must focus on the quality of service offered by training centers at all educational levels and on the employment of professionals. We must focus on the evaluation of curricular elements, which revolve around: what kind of man do we want to form? What should students learn? How should the learning process be carried out? With what resources should the teaching-learning process be carried out? And how will the evaluation process be carried out?

The human development index must take into account the harmonious and equitable development of a country's cities, since large cities have a much higher level of human development than geographically distant cities. Indeed, Peru is historically an eminently centralist country; almost a third of its population lives in Lima, "most of the productive and commercial activities are located in Lima. The city of Lima concentrates 86% of the tax revenue, 57% of the industrial activity, 62% of the commercial activity, 46% of the EAP and 53% of the GDP" (Vargas Morales, 2008, p. 205). There are also marked differences between citizens of the same geographical space; just as there are people who have a high level of human development, there are those who cannot satisfy their basic needs.

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