

# Impact Of Professional Practice On Students' Human Development

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## Abstract:

*Professional practices have emerged as a pedagogical strategy that allows students to acquire essential skills and strengthen competencies for their professional growth. This paper is part of the research project entitled "Incidence of professional practice on the disciplinary competencies and the level of human development of students at the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe - CECAR". The objective is to evaluate the level of human development of students who participate in professional practices in the Corporación Universitaria del Caribe CECAR first period 2023. The methodology had a quantitative approach of descriptive type, the population are the students in professional practice of CECAR, the sample is 330 students of the Faculty of Humanities and Education. Data collection was carried out using the Scale of Human Development in University Students (Ruiz, 2004). The results revealed that the students of the Faculty of Humanities and Education who showed high levels of human development before starting their professional practices came from the Psychology, Social Work and Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and Literature programs. In contrast, the Sports Science and Physical Activity, Bachelor's Degree in English and Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy programs presented medium levels. After completing their internships, it was evidenced that most of the students who initially had a medium level of human development improved to a high level, with the exception of students of the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Bachelor's Degree in English, who remained at the medium level. In conclusion, professional practices have a significant impact on the promotion of human development in the educational context.*

**Keywords:** Human development, university students, professional practices, transformation, educational context.

## INTRODUCTION

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Professional practice is not simply a repetitive exercise in work environments; It goes further, involving careful planning, monitoring and evaluation. This definition implies a rigorous approach to professional practices, considering them as an essential component of the university educational process. It is essential to understand them as the crucial link between academic training and the student's future working life. This understanding is crucial to give due importance to professional practice, recognizing it as a fundamental element for the comprehensive preparation of the student (Moreno cited in Cáceres, 2019).

Under this definition, professional practice is seen as a fundamental pedagogical strategy. It is not simply a curricular requirement; It is an opportunity for students to develop specific skills in line with the profile of their study program. Moreover, these internships make it possible to strengthen essential skills and abilities for their future professional career. This process not only consolidates theoretical knowledge in practical applications, but also contributes to the integral formation of the individual, promoting both specific and transversal skills. Therefore, professional internships are a means for the multidimensional growth of students, preparing them not only as competent professionals but also as individuals who can be fully integrated into the world of work and society (Castro Rubilar, 2015).

According to the above, professional practice can be related to the integrality of the human being and its development in university environments. Being an integral component of the educational process, professional practices not only offer opportunities to apply learned theory, but also nourish crucial aspects of human development (Beraza, 2016). By facing practical and challenging situations, students not only gain practical knowledge, but also develop interpersonal skills, empathy, and emotional resilience. These experiences not only transform them professionally, but also contribute significantly to their personal and emotional growth, thus cementing the direct connection between professional practice and human development.

This process of human development, influenced by professional practices, is complex and multifaceted. It is not just about acquiring practical knowledge, but about internalizing ethical values, gaining confidence, and learning to adapt to various challenges (Mendivil, et al., 2023). Professional practices encourage self-exploration and self-reflection, where students can evaluate their own beliefs, values, and goals. This process not only contributes to the construction of competent professionals, but also nurtures balanced, self-aware, and empathetic individuals, which is essential for their future contribution to both the workplace and society as a whole. Thus, the transition from the understanding of professional practice to its impact on human development reveals its profound transformative power in the lives of university students.

In the continuous quest to improve the quality of life and promote more equitable and just societies, human development has emerged as a fundamental concept. Beyond the traditional metrics of economic progress, human development focuses on the holistic well-being of people. This multidimensional approach considers vital aspects such as education, health, gender equity and access to resources as fundamental pillars for a full and dignified life.

In the context of professional practice, understanding and applying the principles of human development is essential. Professionals, whether educators, social workers, doctors, or any other field, play a crucial role in building more just and sustainable societies. By understanding the fundamental elements of human development, professionals can actively contribute to expanding the opportunities and capabilities of the people they serve (Sen, 1998).

This holistic understanding of human development drives professionals to go beyond simple superficial solutions and into the complexities of the lives of the people they assist. From ensuring access to quality education to advocating for adequate health services, professionals have an ethical and moral responsibility to empower people so they can actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

In the conceptualization of Human Development according to Navarro (2004), based mainly on the ideas of Roger (1978) and Lafarga (2004), it stands out as a person-centered concept. On the other hand, Ruiz (2004) expands this notion within the university environment, defining human development through dimensions that include openness to new experiences, responsibility, emotional congruence, performance satisfaction, safety and quality. in interpersonal relationships.

According to Ruiz (2004), human development has the following dimensions:

- **Openness to experience:** This refers to a person's ability to understand, value, and act on the information they perceive from the environment.
- **Responsibility:** This refers to the individual's ability to have organization, efficiency, and planning in actions. This is demonstrated through commitment and the achievement of set goals.
- **Congruence - correspondence between feeling and expression:** Indicates people's ability to align what they think, feel, and do in their actions and expressions.
- **Performance satisfaction:** It represents the feeling of fulfillment and contentment in all areas of life, indicating an overall balance and contentment.
- **Confidence:** It manifests itself through positive impulses towards proactivity and self-evaluation.

Human development, as a fundamental concept in the academic and social spheres, focuses on the expansion of people's opportunities and capacities to lead a full and dignified life. Within this approach, openness to experience implies people's ability to understand information coming from the world around them, this element is essential for adaptability and continuous learning, allowing people to effectively manage the complexities of modern life (Ruiz, 2004).

Another crucial dimension of human development, according to Ruiz (2004), is responsibility, which translates into organizational capacity and efficiency in daily actions. Responsible people demonstrate commitment and achieve their goals consistently. Congruence between feeling and expression is equally essential, as it involves the capacity for linear thoughts, emotions, and actions. When there is internal consistency, people can communicate and relate authentically, building meaningful connections with others.

Performance satisfaction reflects a state of fulfillment and contentment in multiple areas of life. This sense of accomplishment and well-being contributes significantly to human development, providing a solid emotional foundation to face challenges and pursue goals (Ruiz, 2004). These dimensions intertwine to create a complete picture of human development, emphasizing the importance of coherence, accountability, and meaningful relationships in personal and social growth.

However, in the field of education, professional internships are defined as an educational experience that allows students to apply and develop skills and theoretical knowledge acquired during their academic training in a real work environment (Ramírez Iberico, 2013). During the internship, students have the opportunity to work in real situations of their professional field under the supervision and guidance of experienced professionals. This experience provides a gradual transition between the academic world and the world of work, allowing students to

become familiar with the demands and expectations of the professional field they are preparing to enter (Echeverri-Gallo, 2018).

Professional practicum, also known as internship or work practice, is a fundamental component of higher education that gives students the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real work environment. During this experience, students have the possibility of working in companies, organizations or institutions related to their field of study, allowing them to acquire practical skills, develop specific competencies and become familiar with the dynamics of the world of work (Quintero, Niño & Bolívar, 2021, Rodríguez, & Palacio, 2011, Robles, & Torres, 2017, Úbeda, 2013). This internship period takes place under the supervision of practising professionals and provides a gradual transition between academic and professional settings.

One of the essential characteristics of professional practice is its practical and work-oriented approach. Through this experience, students not only have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge, but also to face challenges and solve real problems that arise in the workplace. In addition, professional practice fosters the development of soft skills such as teamwork, effective communication, and leadership, which are critical in any professional environment (Mendivil, et. al., 2023).

Another key aspect of professional practice is its ability to offer a concrete and up-to-date vision of the demands of the labour market. By interacting with professionals in their field and participating in real projects, students can understand current trends, technologies, and practices in their industry. This in-depth understanding of the field of work not only enriches your learning, but also improves your employability upon graduation, as employers value meaningful hands-on experience (Pirela Morillo & Peña Vera, 2005).

In addition, professional practice plays a crucial role in developing students' self-confidence and self-efficacy. By facing real-life situations and overcoming professional challenges, students gain greater confidence in their skills and abilities. This confidence not only translates into better performance during practice, but also becomes a valuable asset in their future professional career (Beraza, 2016).

However, professional practice plays a fundamental role in human development, impacting several dimensions that are essential for the personal and professional growth of individuals. According to Ruiz (2004), one of the crucial dimensions of human development is openness to experience. Professional practice provides individuals with a unique opportunity to interact with various situations and people in a real work environment. This contact with the reality of work broadens their perspective, fostering their understanding and appreciation of the information in the environment, which contributes significantly to this dimension.

Accountability is another key dimension of human development that is strengthened through professional practice. During the internship, students are faced with situations that require organization, efficiency and planning in their actions. Fulfilling assigned responsibilities in a work environment improves your ability to set goals and commit to their achievement, demonstrating a high level of responsibility in your professional tasks.

Congruence between feeling and expression is essential for the development of effective interpersonal relationships and for a positive self-image (Ruiz, 2004). Professional practice provides a context where individuals can align their thoughts, emotions, and actions coherently. By interacting with colleagues and superiors, students learn to communicate authentically, which strengthens this dimension of human development.

Performance satisfaction is another dimension that is influenced by professional practices. By succeeding in assigned tasks and receiving positive feedback, students experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment in their work. This contentment extends to all areas of life, contributing to an overall balance and a sense of contentment. The feeling of fulfillment at work directly influences your emotional and mental well-being.

As for the security dimension, it is manifested in proactivity and self-evaluation (Ruiz, 2004). During internships, students face challenges and have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. This experience contributes to their self-confidence and ability to take responsibility for their own learning and professional development. Confidence in their skills and knowledge becomes a valuable asset in their future career, influencing their self-esteem and self-confidence.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research is situated within the framework of the positivist paradigm and adopts a quantitative approach. It focuses on data collection for the purpose of validating hypotheses using numerical methods and statistical analysis. Based on this information, the aim is to identify patterns of behavior and test theories (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2006).

Regarding the type of study, it is an explanatory research that aims to examine the influence of the independent variable (professional practice) on the dependent variables (human development). In this context, the effects of the independent variable on the dependent variables are analyzed. The methodological design adopted is pre-experimental, according to the definition of Ávila (2006), which implies studying a single group with minimal control. In this case, the same population will be used before and after the application of the variable in question to carry out the research.

The participants of this study were students who were doing their professional internship during the period 2023-1 at the Caribbean University Corporation CECAR. The sample included 330 students from the Faculty of Humanities and Education. A simple random probability sampling method was used, which ensures that "each unit in the population has an equal probability of being selected" (López, 2004, p. 70).

To collect data, the Student Human Development Scale developed by Ruiz (2004) was implemented. This scale evaluated various dimensions of the human development of students in professional practice, including their openness to new experiences, congruence, responsibility, satisfaction with performance, safety, and quality of interpersonal relationships.

## **RESULTS**

The results obtained from the research project on the impact of professional internships on the human development of students of the Faculty of Humanities and Education of the University Corporation of the Caribbean CECAR show that before starting the professional internships, it was observed that students who showed high levels of human development came mainly from the Psychology programs. Social Work and Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics and Literature. On the other hand, students in the Sports Science and Physical Activity, Bachelor's Degree in English, and Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy programs presented intermediate levels of human development in this initial period.

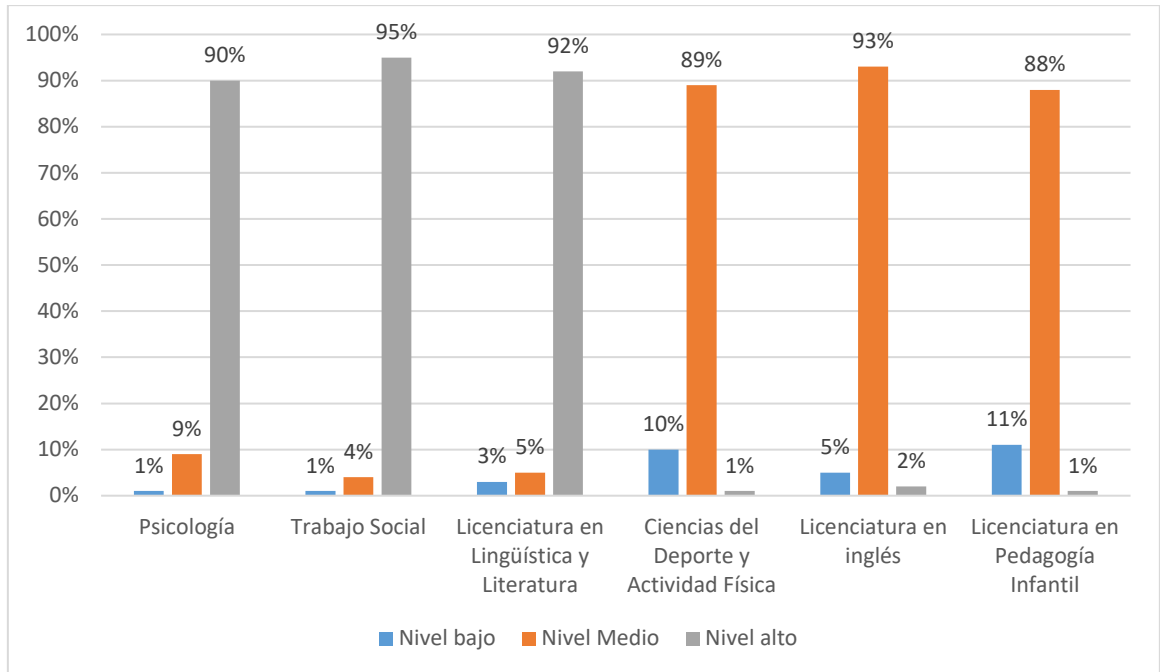


Figure N1. Level of human development of students before starting the professional practice. Source: Authors. In original language: Spanish

In a second moment, the questionnaire was applied again to the same students after the completion of their professional practice, in the results a significant change in the levels of human development of the students was evidenced. Most of the students who initially had a medium level of human development improved markedly, reaching high levels after completing their internships. This increase in human development was seen in the Sports Science and Physical Activity program.

Despite these improvements, some exceptions were observed in the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Bachelor's Degree in English programs, where students remained at the middle level of human development after completing their professional practice.

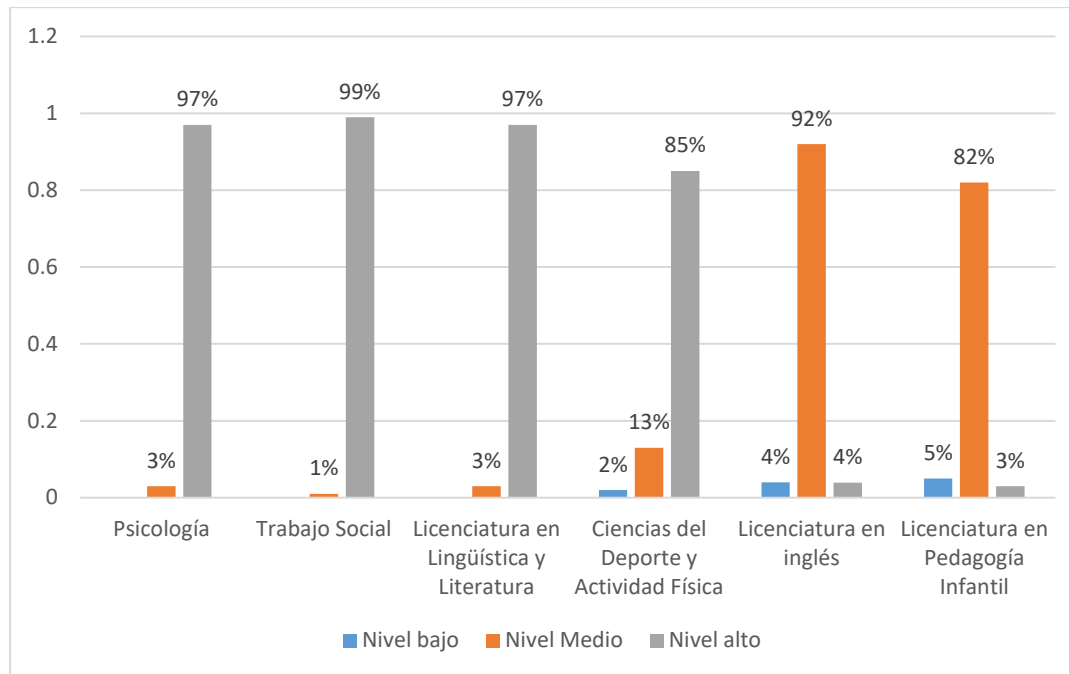


Figure N2. Level of Human Development of students after completing the professional internship. Source: Authors. In original language: Spanish

The results obtained clearly indicate the positive impact of professional practices on the human development of students of the Faculty of Humanities and Education. The programs of Psychology, Social Work, Sports Science and Physical Activity, Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature raised the levels of human development of the participating students. However, the need for further research to understand the reasons behind the lack of improvement in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Pedagogy and Bachelor of Arts in English programs is highlighted.

These results are of great relevance for the design and implementation of future internship programs in the faculty, and underline the importance of these experiences in the integral development of university students.

## DISCUSSION

The discussion of results in this study aligns with previous research that has analyzed the impact of professional practices on the human development of students in various disciplines and educational contexts. The findings of Barrera and Hinojosa (2020) in the field of physical education highlight the importance of professional practice as a fundamental space where students can apply and strengthen their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These results coincide with those obtained in this study, where it was observed that professional practice contributed significantly to the human development of students, especially in programs such as Sports Science and Physical Activity.

Herrera's (2013) research also provides support for the results presented in this study. The fact that professional practice has had a significant impact on the initial training of students, contributing to the development of skills, abilities, values and attitudes necessary for teacher training, reinforces the idea that professional practices play a crucial role in the human and professional growth of students. This finding reflects the experience observed in the Social

Work and Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature programs, where students experienced notable improvements in their human development after completing their internships.

The study conducted by Peña et al. (2016) in Venezuela also correlates with the results of this study. The conclusion that professional internships strengthen the graduate profile of students in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes is in line with the findings observed in the Psychology and Social Work programs. These students showed a significant increase in their human development after completing their internships, indicating that the internship contributes significantly to the improvement of their graduate profile.

Ramírez (2013) research in Peru also provides additional evidence of the importance of professional practices in the human development of students. The improvement of the capacities, skills, abilities and attitudes observed in Sport Science and Physical Activity students after their professional internship supports the idea that professional practice not only enriches the educational experience, but also significantly improves the human development of students.

Taken together, these previous studies and the results obtained in this research project underline the relevance and positive impact of professional practices on the human development of university students. The programs of Psychology, Social Work, Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature, as well as Sports Science and Physical Activity, benefited significantly from this experience, improving their levels of human development and preparing them comprehensively for their professional future. These results support the need to continue to foster and enhance internship opportunities in academic programs to enrich students' human development.

The study by Quintero et al. (2021) reveals that professional practices can vary in their impact, either by increasing, decreasing, or maintaining students' professional dispositions. These results suggest that students' personal attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in how they perceive and absorb internship experiences, which aligns with findings observed in the Bachelor of English and Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Pedagogy programs, where levels of human development remained in an intermediate range.

The work of Echeverri (2018) provides a valuable perspective on the importance of professional practices in the training of future professionals. The ability to link academic theories to real-world situations, as emphasized in Echeverri's study, correlates with the experience observed in Sports Science and Physical Activity programs, where students showed notable improvements in their levels of human development after their internships. This direct connection between theoretical learning and its practical application in a professional setting may have contributed significantly to their human development.

García's (2018) study in the university field highlights the value of professional internships as a springboard for job placement. The relevance of these internships to enhance skills and focus on areas of interest is reflected in the Psychology and Social Work programs, where students showed a notable increase in their human development after completing their internships. These findings indicate that internships not only prepare students for the job market, but also enrich their human development by providing meaningful and relevant experiences in their field of study.

The above-mentioned studies and the results of this research project emphasize the diversity of students' experiences and perceptions during internships. While, for some programs, such as Psychology and Social Work, professional practices were catalysts for meaningful human development, for others, such as the Bachelor of Arts in English and the Bachelor of Arts in



Early Childhood Pedagogy, professional practices kept levels of human development in an intermediate range. These results point to the need to adapt and personalize internship experiences to ensure that all students have the opportunity to maximize their human and professional growth during this crucial period of their academic training. In addition, they highlight the importance of personal attitudes and dispositions in the perception and absorption of internship experiences, which can significantly influence the human development of students.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the evaluation of the impact of professional practices on the human development of students in the Faculty of Humanities and Education, it provides a comprehensive view of the influence of these pedagogical experiences on the personal and professional growth of individuals.

First, it highlights the fundamental role of professional practices as catalysts for human development. Students who participated in programs such as Psychology, Sports Science and Physical Activity, Social Work, and Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Literature experienced a significant increase in their levels of human development. This improvement not only translates into greater openness to new experiences, but also into greater responsibility, emotional congruence, and quality in interpersonal relationships. These findings suggest that professional internships are not only opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, but also spaces where holistic growth is fostered.

Second, challenges were identified in the Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Bachelor's degree in English programs, where students did not show a significant change in their levels of human development after professional internships. These situations deserve special attention from educational institutions, as they could indicate specific areas for improvement in the internship programs or in the pedagogical methods used. It is crucial to analyze the reasons behind this lack of improvement in order to implement effective corrective strategies.

In addition, these results highlight the importance of considering contextual and program-specific factors when designing professional practices. Not all disciplines respond in the same way to these experiences, highlighting the need for personalized approaches tailored to the characteristics of each field of study.

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