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Competency Profile of Social Work in Educational Institutions: An Empirically Derived Three-Factor Framework

María del Mar Fernández Martínez^a, Andrea Ibáñez López^b,
and Antonio Luque de la Rosa^c

^aDepartment of Sociology, Social Work and Public Health, University of Huelva, Huelva, Spain; ^bCommunity Social Services Area, Almería City Council, Almería, Spain; ^cDepartment of Education, University of Almería, Almería, Spain

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to empirically define the competency profile of social work professionals in educational institutions by identifying and structuring core competencies that articulate their professional role within the educational system.

Materials and methods: A quantitative descriptive-exploratory design was employed. Data were collected from 859 participants (students and graduates linked to Andalusian universities). An initial 24-item questionnaire was developed and subsequently refined through statistical analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the factorial structure of the instrument.

Results: The analysis resulted in a factorial structure comprising 15 competencies organized into three interrelated factors: competencies related to work with teaching staff, competencies focused on students, and competencies oriented toward families. The model demonstrated satisfactory goodness-of-fit indicators, supporting the internal coherence and empirical consistency of the proposed competency framework.

Discussion: Findings contribute to clarifying the professional role of social work within educational institutions by providing an empirically grounded structuring of competencies. The results address the existing gap between the discursive recognition of school social work and the limited systematic delimitation of its competency profile.

Conclusion: This study offers an evidence-based competency framework that strengthens the alignment between university training and professional practice, contributing to the disciplinary delimitation and institutional positioning of social work in educational contexts.

KEYWORDS

School social work;
professional role;
competency framework;
educational institutions;
evidence-informed practice

Introduction

Educational inequality and institutional complexity

Within the framework of contemporary democratic systems, the comprehensive protection of children and families constitutes one of the central commitments of public authorities, in line with international agreements and frameworks that recognize and

CONTACT María Del Mar Fernández Martínez  mar.fernandez@dstso.uhu.es  Department of Sociology, Social Work and Public Health, University of Huelva, Huelva, Spain

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guarantee the rights of children and adolescents. From this perspective, educational institutions are configured as strategic and privileged settings for the early detection and prevention of situations that may interfere with the holistic development of children and adolescents. In this context, it is important to highlight the functional capacity of social services, within which social workers play a leading role, as their contribution is central to supporting both children and their families in addressing child protection issues within schools. Their integration has been shown to improve educational and wellbeing outcomes (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Accordingly, the incorporation of the social worker into the field of education as an integral component of the educational system itself becomes a necessary step.

At present, educational systems tend to be organized around a set of principles which, despite contextual variations, may be considered relatively universal, at least with regard to basic normative frameworks, such as compulsory attendance and free access, thereby constituting education as a social right for citizens. However, this very universalization, which projects homogeneous solutions, may paradoxically contribute to the reinforcement of inequalities of origin, displacing social inequalities into forms of inequality that tend to be perceived as natural (Reay, 2018; Slee, 2019).

In this process, the progressive incorporation of all children and adolescents, together with their respective family environments, generates an emerging core of social needs that exceeds traditional frameworks of educational intervention and increasingly poses new demands on institutions. Responding to this scenario does not merely entail a quantitative increase in professional resources, but above all a diversification of the professional profiles that make up educational institutions. This implies moving toward interdisciplinary models of intervention in which different professionals – teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, social educators, social workers, among others – make possible a holistic approach that remains connected to students' social and family contexts, within a setting characterized by the growing complexity of contemporary educational systems and the need for intersectoral and inclusive approaches (Ainscow, 2020; Edwards, 2017; OECD, 2018).

The role of social work in educational contexts

All of the above leads to the need to introduce, within an interdisciplinary framework, the figure of the social worker as a coordinator or facilitator of social interventions and processes aimed at improving classroom and school climate, while also addressing situations of need affecting students and families through the management of resources appropriate to each identified problem situation. In this way, social work comes to play an essential role within the school institution by collaborating with the educational team in resolving biopsychosocial and economic problems that affect students and their environments in the school context (Verdiyeva & Saniyeva, 2024).

This analysis also points to the need to rethink the professional profiles that make up the educational field, insofar as the social worker has historically proven to be a relevant agent in facilitating students' inclusion in schools and promoting appropriate development across different academic and personal stages.

Within this framework, it is pertinent to consider that a conceptual shift is taking place with regard to the traditional way in which schools and teachers assumed almost exclusive responsibility for the educational process. Today, this responsibility is broadened and

challenged by the emergence of new elements of social complexity and by the intervention of a plurality of agents called upon to respond to emerging demands. In this regard, particular importance is attributed to family environments, the community, and the range of social agents that interact with the school institution.

The centrality of families in the educational process is key to the construction of quality schools, grounded in shared educational projects involving the entire educational community, in which collaboration extends to both the management and evaluation of educational processes (Hernández Prados & Tolino Fernández-Henarejos, 2013). From this perspective, the primary aim of family involvement is to reduce discrepancies between the values and content transmitted by schools and those shaped within the family context, fostering synergies between both spheres and helping to mitigate situations in which the family environment constitutes a factor of sociocultural disadvantage (Epstein, 2018; Fernández Batanero, 2005). As Deslandes (2019) notes, family and community participation is consistently associated with higher levels of academic achievement and student wellbeing, particularly in contexts of social inequality.

In this scenario, social work emerges as an essential discipline within the educational system, insofar as it provides a preventive perspective, contributes to educational inclusion, and strengthens synergistic actions between schools and family environments, thereby directly influencing the quality of the educational system and its capacity to respond to social diversity (Fernández Fernández, 2011, 2014). In this respect, international organizations emphasize that close cooperation between different educational agents and social services not only generates positive synergies in addressing complex student needs but also strengthens mechanisms of primary prevention and overall wellbeing (UNICEF, 2022). Nevertheless, this contribution necessarily raises the question of which bodies of knowledge and professional competencies enable social workers to perform their role effectively within an institutional educational framework characterized by social complexity and a diversity of involved agents.

From this perspective, social work competencies are oriented toward the capacity to intervene in and transform the social systems in which practice takes place, including the educational sphere. Here, a whole-school approach seeks to improve school climate, promote wellbeing, and enable interventions aligned with students' social, personal and family realities. Such intervention aims to foster processes of educational inclusion and to guide both teaching staff and family environments, promoting shared responsibility within the teaching – learning process (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; López Mero et al., 2016).

Paradoxically, however, despite having had a presence in this field in earlier periods, social workers have progressively lost ground within contemporary educational systems, becoming a residual, if not entirely absent, figure in many contexts. Recent research indicates that social workers face barriers such as structural staff shortages, limited professional recognition, and difficulties in interdisciplinary collaboration, all of which constrain their potential impact in school settings (Huxtable, 2022; Kelly et al., 2015).

Professional competence in social work responds to the practitioner's capacity to adjust interventions in a contextualized manner (Fernández Fernández, 2011; Healy, 2022), within a scenario in which social movements, institutional contexts, socioeconomic conditions and everyday dynamics are in constant transformation, generating new challenges for social intervention (Carballeda, 2008; Payne, 2020). However, despite the growing discursive presence of social work in the educational field, the definition of the core set of

competencies underpinning such intervention in institutional educational contexts remains poorly delimited. This has favored fragmented approaches, often subordinated to diverse normative or functional frameworks (Frey et al., 2012). From this standpoint, professional intervention requires structured and methodologically grounded responses that act not only on the specific circumstances of intervention, but also as mechanisms of social integration and facilitation.

Professional competencies in social work: conceptual debates and state of the art

The analysis of professional competencies in the field of social work is embedded within a broad conceptual debate marked by a degree of ambiguity. The very term *competence* is polysemic, complicating its delimitation, as it may refer both to what individuals are capable of doing, what they ought to do, or what they actually do in professional practice (Eraut, 2011; Le Deist & Winterton, 2005; Mulder, 2014).

From this perspective, authors such as Billett (2013), Hager and Hodkinson (2009), and Tejada Fernández and Navío Gámez (2005) emphasize that competence is inextricably linked to context, insofar as its exercise entails the flexible mobilization of diverse resources in response to situational demands. This approach does not lead to an infinite proliferation of situation-specific competencies but rather highlights the capacity to articulate contextualized responses through variable combinations of knowledge, skills and attitudes, thereby aligning with international debates on situated and practice-based competence.

Within this framework, the concept of competence occupies a broad and weakly delimited semantic field, strongly related to notions such as skills, capacities, attitudes or aptitudes. This reinforces its non-consensual character and its subjection to ongoing processes of redefinition in response to changing social, professional and institutional contexts (Eraut, 2011, Martínez Sánchez, 2009; Mulder, 2017). Such conceptual breadth complicates its operationalization and translation into concrete educational or professional frameworks.

The absence of a clear conceptual consensus around competencies has had a direct impact on university-level social work education. A significant example is the study coordinated by Vázquez Aguado (2005) for Spain's National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), which proposed a catalog of transversal and specific competencies for the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. These were organized around broad capacities related to intervention with individuals, families and communities, the planning and evaluation of professional practice, the responsible management of interventions, and the demonstration of professional competence. While such proposals have contributed to greater coherence in educational processes, they also highlight the difficulty of formulating universal competencies detached from the institutional contexts in which they must be enacted. This reinforces their general and transversal nature (Eraut, 2011; Mulder, 2014) and complicates their direct transfer to specific fields of professional practice.

The specialized literature also indicates that social work competencies acquire distinctive profiles depending on the specific domains of professional intervention. In areas such as health, community social work, or the penal and justice system, relatively more defined frameworks of practice have been developed, linked to specific functions,

responsibilities and institutional settings. However, this process of competence delimitation is less evident in the educational field, where social work intervention unfolds within particularly complex and heterogeneous scenarios, characterized by interaction with other professional profiles and the coexistence of multiple devices and levels of action (Allen-Meares et al., 2013).

Within educational contexts, existing academic production has tended to focus primarily on describing the functions, roles and tasks of social workers, as well as their contribution to educational inclusion and the addressing of vulnerability. Various studies highlight their role in the detection of risk situations, mediation in school conflicts, inter-institutional coordination, and intervention with students and families in contexts of social disadvantage (Arranz Montull & Torralba Roselló, 2016; Bye et al., 2009; Concha Toro, 2012; Kelly et al., 2015). Similarly, their relevance is emphasized in processes of educational inclusion, particularly in relation to students with disabilities or specific educational needs, where social work intervention contributes to individualizing educational responses and facilitating students' integration into mainstream education systems (Balli, 2016; López Mero et al., 2016).

Alongside these approaches, other studies underscore the ambiguous or poorly defined perception of the social worker's role among other educational agents. Research such as that by Caselman and Brandt (2007) or Higy et al. (2012) shows that, even in contexts where school social work is institutionalized, a lack of clarity regarding its role persists, fostering overlaps with other professional profiles and hindering recognition within educational teams. In a similar vein, more recent research by Álvarez León (2022) suggests that this lack of competence definition may limit the preventive and transformative potential of social work in educational settings, particularly in contexts characterized by high social complexity.

Overall, the review of the state of the art reveals a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the literature consistently recognizes the relevance of social work in educational contexts and documents a wide range of functions, areas of intervention and professional contributions linked to diversity, inclusion and student wellbeing. On the other hand, this academic production does not converge on a clear and systematic delimitation of the professional competencies that structure such intervention. These competencies often appear implicitly within functional descriptions, fragmented across partial approaches, or subordinated to specific normative and institutional frameworks. This indeterminacy not only affects professional recognition and the articulation of interdisciplinary work in educational settings but also poses significant challenges for social work education and practice in these contexts (Frey et al., 2012).

This gap justifies the need for empirical research aimed at operationally structuring these competencies.

Study objective

Within this state of knowledge, the present study aimed to analyze and characterize the professional competencies that structure social work intervention in educational contexts, with the purpose of advancing toward greater conceptual clarity in the delineation of this professional profile.

In order to operationalize this objective, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What core competencies underpin social work intervention in institutional educational contexts?
- (2) To what extent can these competencies be empirically organized into a coherent factorial structure?
- (3) How are these competencies distributed across the main agents of the educational system (students, families, and teaching staff)?

Materials and methods

Design

The present study adopted a descriptive-exploratory quantitative design aimed at analyzing the professional competencies of social work in institutional educational contexts. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire in order to identify and structure a set of competencies relevant to professional intervention in this field.

Participants

A total of 859 individuals participated in the study. With respect to gender, valid responses were obtained from 847 participants (158 men, 681 women, and 8 identifying as other), with 12 missing responses. Participants were aged between 18 and 64 years ($M = 28.96$; $SD = 12.89$). The sample comprised graduates and students affiliated with the Universities of Almería, Granada and Huelva (Andalusia, Spain). In the case of students ($n = 625$), participants were mainly enrolled in degree programs in Social Work, Social Education, and Early Childhood and Primary Education, with only three cases drawn from other degree programs.

Instrument

The initial set of items was derived from a comprehensive review of reviewing normative, academic and professional sources related to social work and education. These sources included the catalog of competencies for the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work proposed by ANECA (Vázquez Aguado, 2005), as well as contributions from the specialized literature on professional competencies and social work in educational contexts (Díaz Herráiz, 2011; López Luna & Chaparro Maldonado, 2006). This process resulted in an initial set of competencies that were subsequently translated into a preliminary instrument of 24 items. This theoretical review was complemented by a qualitative validation process involving experienced social work professionals in educational settings. This process enabled the refinement and specification of a set of competencies considered conceptually central and empirically manageable. As a result of this theoretical-practical process, the final set of 24 items therefore reflects a process of theoretical foundation and refinement based on expert opinion, prior to statistical validation.

These items were initially organized into three broad domains of professional intervention (family, students and teaching staff) as a preliminary structural proposal for analyzing social work competencies in educational institutions.

Based on this configuration, a questionnaire-type instrument was designed (Appendix 1), structured in two sections. The first section collected basic professional and sociodemographic information from participants, while the second comprised a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all important; 5 = very important) including the 24 items, aimed at assessing the perceived relevance of the proposed competencies.

Procedure

Data collection was carried out at the Universities of Almería, Granada and Huelva. For students, the questionnaire was administered in person using a paper-based format in university classrooms. For professionals linked to educational and social contexts, individual administration was conducted, with participants contacted through academic and training networks associated with these institutions. The process was supported by collaboration with teaching staff involved in degree programs related to education and social fields, who acted as mediators to facilitate access to participant groups within these institutional contexts.

The data collection protocol included a section designed to gather sociodemographic and academic information (e.g. year of study, university of affiliation and other descriptive variables), allowing for an adequate characterization of the sample.

The administration sessions were conducted without significant incidents and lasted approximately 30–40 minutes, depending on the group, with greater flexibility in the case of individual sessions involving teaching staff and professionals from institutional settings. Throughout the process, administration was supervised by one of the three authors of the study, ensuring homogeneous conditions of application and the resolution of any questions raised by participants.

Upon completion of each session, the questionnaires were collected, archived and securely stored by one of the researchers at the University of Almería, in full compliance with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. The data were subsequently entered manually into a database and processed using the statistical software SPSS (version 23).

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 23 and AMOS version 21, with the aim of examining the factorial structure and reliability of the *Questionnaire on Social Work Competencies in Educational Institutions*. In an initial phase, descriptive analyses of the items were performed, including means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations, in order to explore the general behavior of the variables.

Subsequently, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were carried out to assess the fit of an initial theoretical three-factor model corresponding to the conceptual dimensions of intervention with students, families and teaching staff. Model estimation was performed using the maximum likelihood method, complemented by a bootstrapping procedure with 6,000 resamples to obtain more stable standard errors in the presence of potential departures from multivariate normality (Byrne, 2013).

Model fit was evaluated using a combination of absolute and incremental indices commonly accepted in methodological literature. Specifically, RMSEA and SRMR were considered, with values equal to or below .06 interpreted as indicative of good fit, along with the CFI, TLI and IFI indices, for which values equal to or above .95 were deemed acceptable. In addition, the χ^2 /df ratio was examined, with values between 2 and 3 considered indicative of a reasonable fit (Hair et al., 2006).

During the analytical process, progressive model re-specification was undertaken, guided by statistical criteria and considerations of parsimony. Items exhibiting insufficient factor loadings or contributing problematically to overall model fit were removed, while preserving the theoretical coherence of the evaluated dimensions. This procedure led to a final factorial structure with satisfactory fit indices.

Finally, the internal reliability of the resulting scales was estimated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, both considered complementary indicators of internal consistency. Overall, the analyses conducted enabled a rigorous evaluation of the structure and reliability of the proposed instrument, in line with the objectives of the study.

Ethical considerations

The doctoral research project was prospectively approved by the International Doctoral School of the University of Almería on April 26, 2017, and institutional authorization to access educational centers was formally issued by the Coordination of the Doctoral Program in Education in January 2018. The study was conducted in accordance with the fundamental ethical principles applicable to social and educational research. Participation was voluntary and limited to adults. Data were collected through a self-administered paper-based questionnaire that ensured anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the study and their right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without negative consequences. No experimental intervention or work with vulnerable populations was involved.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to analyze the factorial structure of the Questionnaire on Social Work Competencies in Educational Institutions, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted using the maximum likelihood estimation method, with bootstrapping correction (6,000 resamples), given the observed deviations from multivariate normality. Analyses were conducted using cases with complete data on the items included in the measurement model (listwise deletion).

In the first stage, the fit of the initial theoretical model composed of 24 items distributed across three latent factors (Students, Families and Teaching Staff) was evaluated. The obtained indices indicated a moderate model fit: χ^2 (249, $N = 851$) = 1811.30, $p < .001$; χ^2 /df = 7.27; CFI = .83; TLI = .83; IFI = .83; RMSEA = .086 (95% CI = .082–.090); SRMR = .061. Although several indicators fell outside the recommended thresholds, the standardized regression weights were statistically significant ($p < .001$), which allowed the identification of areas for improvement in model specification.

Following commonly accepted criteria in factor analysis, a process of progressive refinement of the instrument was undertaken, considering both the magnitude of factor loadings and the conceptual coherence of the items. At this stage, items with standardized loadings below .50 (items 2, 3, 9, 21 and 23) were removed. A second CFA conducted on the refined model showed an improvement in fit indices: χ^2 (149, $N = 851$) = 883.86, $p < .001$; $\chi^2 / df = 5.93$; CFI = .88; TLI = .88; IFI = .88; RMSEA = .075 (95% CI = .070–.080); SRMR = .056. Factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and ranged between .55 and .72.

Further analysis of standardized residuals and residual covariances revealed overlap among certain items, indicating the need for additional model re-specification. Consequently, items 4, 13, 20 and 22 were removed. The third CFA, conducted on the final version of the instrument, demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the empirical data: χ^2 (87, $N = 851$) = 259.80, $p < .001$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.99$; CFI = .96; TLI = .96; IFI = .96; RMSEA = .051 (95% CI = .045–.058); SRMR = .042. In this final model, all standardized regression weights were statistically significant ($p < .001$) and ranged between .69 and .82, supporting the robustness of the resulting factorial structure.

Figure 1 presents the final fitted model, in which three clearly differentiated factors (Students, Teaching Staff and Families) can be observed, with high and statistically

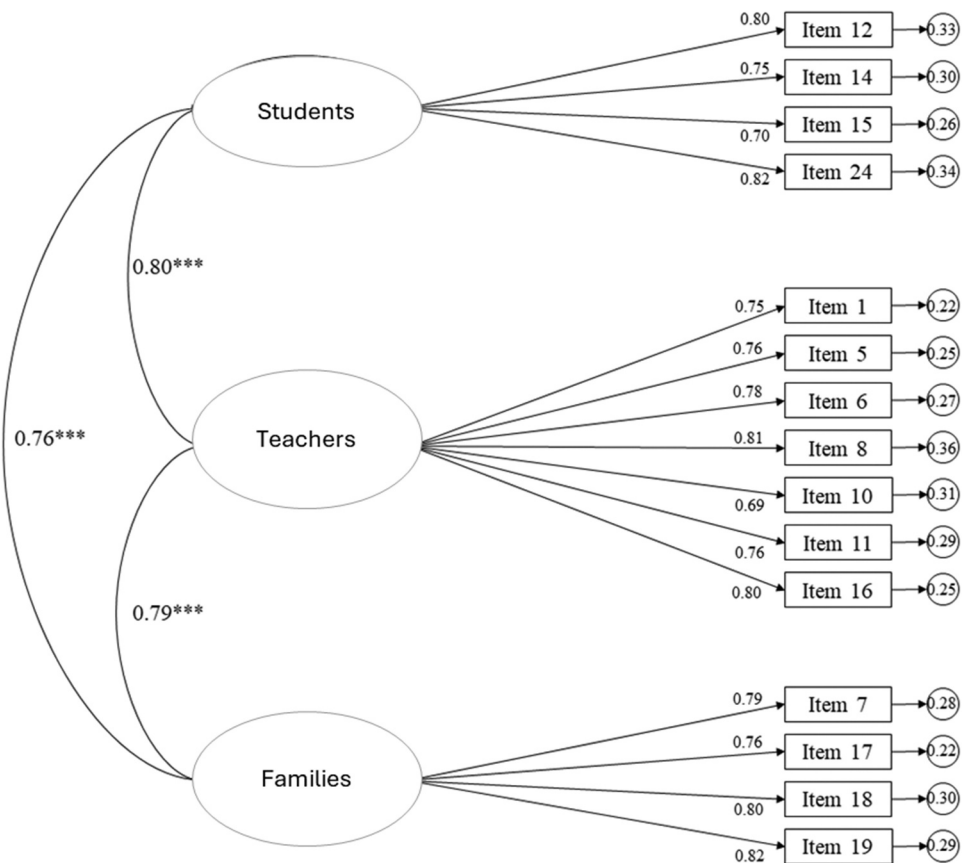


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the questionnaire on *social work competencies in educational Institutions*. Ellipses represent latent factors and rectangles represent observed items. Residual variances are shown in the small circles.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and bivariate correlations.

Factors	M	SD	α	ω	1	2	3
1. Students	4.04	.77	.80	.82	–	.68***	.72***
2. Families	4.17	.68	.84	.85		–	.74***
3. Teaching Staff	4.04	.71	.80	.81			–

Note: *** $p < .001$.

significant correlations between them. This pattern suggests an interrelated core of competencies within the framework of social work intervention in educational contexts.

Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics, reliability indices and bivariate correlations corresponding to the three identified factors. Mean scores for the Students, Families and Teaching Staff factors ranged between 4.04 and 4.17, indicating a high valuation of the analyzed competencies. Standard deviations were relatively low (between .68 and .77), reflecting an adequate degree of response homogeneity.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and McDonald's omega (ω), yielding satisfactory values in all cases (α ranging from .80 to .84; ω from .81 to .85), thus supporting the reliability of the measures employed.

Regarding bivariate correlations, positive and statistically significant associations ($p < .001$) were observed among the three factors: Students and Families ($r = .68$), Students and Teaching Staff ($r = .72$), and Families and Teaching Staff ($r = .74$). These results highlight the interrelated nature of the different dimensions of social work intervention in educational settings, reinforcing the appropriateness of analyzing them in an integrated manner.

Resulting competence proposition

Based on the final fitted factorial model, a core set of 15 professional competencies of social workers in institutional educational contexts was identified. These competencies are organized around three factors corresponding to the main groups that make up the educational community: teaching staff, students and families (Figure 2).

The competencies are reformulated below in conceptual terms, while maintaining explicit correspondence with the original items of the instrument in order to ensure empirical traceability.

a) Competencies related to intervention with teaching staff

- Competence 1. Develop prevention programs related to substance abuse, sexual education, sexually transmitted infections and values education, among others (Item 1).
- Competence 2. Advise teaching staff on factors influencing students' academic performance (Item 5).
- Competence 3. Provide guidance and advice to teaching staff, both collectively and individually, either upon request or at the discretion of the social worker, to enhance their educational practice (Item 6).

Final competencies identified (items)	Scale
1. Develop prevention programs related to substance abuse, sexual education, sexually transmitted infections and values education, among others.	T
5. Advise teachers on aspects that influence students' academic performance.	T
6. Provide guidance and advice to teaching staff, both at group and individual levels, either upon request or when deemed appropriate by the social worker, in order to enhance their educational practice.	T
7. Coordinate, together with the professional team (educational psychologist and psychologist), parent education programs.	F
8. Organize conferences, talks or meetings aimed at helping teachers better understand students.	T
10. Address cases referred by school management bodies or teaching staff, as well as those in which students or their parents request guidance.	T
11. Participate in the academic council as a representative of the guidance department.	T
12. Collaborate in the creation of cultural and recreational programs that benefit students.	S
14. Advise students on study habits and the organization of their free time.	S
15. Analyze and manage absenteeism records provided by schools.	S
16. Participate in evaluation and promotion committees to contribute to the analysis of special cases.	T
17. Seek support from parents' associations for the implementation of projects or events that benefit any sector of the educational community.	F
18. Monitor cases involving special family circumstances.	F
19. Work to raise families' awareness of their role as educational agents in children's development.	F
24. Provide vocational guidance to students intending to pursue vocational education and training.	S

Figure 2. Social work competencies in educational institutions.

- Competence 4. Organize conferences, talks or meetings aimed at improving teachers' understanding of students (Item 8).
- Competence 5. Address cases referred by school management bodies or teaching staff, as well as those in which students or their families request guidance (Item 10).
- Competence 6. Participate in the academic council as a representative of the guidance department (Item 11).
- Competence 7. Participate in evaluation and promotion committees to contribute to the analysis of special cases (Item 16).

b) Competencies related to intervention with students

- Competence 8. Collaborate in the development of cultural and recreational programs that benefit students (Item 12).
- Competence 9. Advise students regarding study habits and the organization of their free time (Item 14).
- Competence 10. Analyze and manage absenteeism records provided by schools (Item 15).
- Competence 11. Provide vocational guidance to students intending to pursue vocational education and training (Item 24).

c) Competencies related to intervention with families

- Competence 12. Coordinate, together with the professional team (educational psychologist and psychologist), parent education programs (Item 7).

- Competence 13. Seek support from parents' associations for the implementation of projects or events benefiting any sector of the educational community (Item 17).
- Competence 14. Monitor cases involving special family circumstances (Item 18).
- Competence 15. Promote families' awareness of their role as educational agents in children's development (Item 19).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze and operationally characterize social work competencies in institutional educational contexts. In this regard, the findings led to the identification of a core set of fifteen final competencies derived from the fitted factorial model, organized around three major areas of intervention structured according to the groups that make up the educational community: students, families and teaching staff. Although the resulting model is supported by empirical evidence, it is grounded in a theoretically informed initial structure that was subsequently refined through statistical analysis.

These three groups constitute central actors in the educational process within institutional contexts. This competence-based organization did not stem from a hypothetical or normative proposal, nor from a classification established a priori. Rather, it represents a structure constructed specifically from the perceptions, experiences and evaluations of professionals and students linked to the field of social work and its interdisciplinary context of intervention.

The organization of the identified competencies around students, families and teaching staff does not merely constitute a functional classification but instead reflects the systemic and relational nature that characterizes interventions in educational settings, a dimension from which social work cannot be dissociated.

While social work has a professional profile defined by specific and distinctive competencies, which is an essential condition for justifying its specificity in relation to other disciplines present in educational contexts, its contribution acquires particular added value precisely through its capacity to act as a mediator among these three major groups.

At the same time, differentiating competencies according to the target group of intervention contributes to greater functional clarity regarding the role of the social worker within educational institutions and supports a clearer delineation of their field of action. This, in turn, helps to prevent professional role overlap and to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration.

The results show clear continuity with general social work competence frameworks proposed in educational and training contexts, such as those included in the catalog of competencies for the Bachelor's Degree in Social Work developed by ANECA (Vázquez Aguado, 2005). In this sense, the competencies identified in the present study exhibit substantial convergence with these broader formulations.

However, in contrast to such transversal frameworks, the present research introduces a contextual specification that allows these competencies to be directly linked to institutional educational settings. In doing so, competencies traditionally formulated in generic terms, or as part of labor-oriented characterizations of social work based on a multifunctional approach (Díaz Herráiz, 2011; López Luna & Chaparro Maldonado, 2006), acquire functional specificity associated with concrete educational scenarios.

More broadly, the international literature on social work in educational contexts has tended to focus on the description of professional roles and functions (Allen-Meares et al., 2013; Frey et al., 2012), repeatedly highlighting the role of social workers in interventions involving students, families and teaching staff.

The findings of the present study are consistent with these perspectives, insofar as they identify competencies directly related to prevention, mediation, interprofessional coordination and support, differentiated according to the main actors shaping the institutional educational process. Unlike other studies primarily centered on functional descriptions of the professional role within partial or specific contexts (Deslandes, 2019), this research contributes to advancing toward a more systematic and structured competence-based delineation of social work practice within the analyzed context.

The identification of a specific competence core for social work in educational contexts within this study may have relevant implications for both the university education of future professionals and professional practice within institutional educational settings.

In this regard, the findings may serve as a reference for the design and revision of curricular content related to educational settings within Social Work degree programs. Likewise, the proposed competence framework could provide a basis for the future development of competence-based assessment instruments, both in academic and professional contexts.

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Although the sample is large, it is restricted to a specific geographical context, and was obtained from participants linked to Andalusian universities which calls for caution in generalizing the findings. Additionally, the data are based on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by subjective interpretations of professional practice. Future research could replicate and extend the proposed competence framework in other educational contexts and with diverse professional samples, thus contributing to the validation and further refinement of the proposed model.

Conclusions

This study set out to identify and operationally characterize the professional competencies of social work in institutional educational contexts, with the aim of advancing toward greater conceptual clarity in the delineation of this professional profile. In line with this objective, the findings make it possible to identify a competence core consisting of 15 specific competencies, directly linked to the field of social work intervention within educational institutions and structured around the three main agents that make up the educational system: students, families and teaching staff.

This differentiated structuring of competencies according to the core groups within the educational context contributes to greater clarity and coherence in defining the professional profile of social workers in this field, which has traditionally been characterized in a fragmented or implicit manner.

In this regard, the resulting competence framework may serve as a useful reference both for reflection on professional practice and for the design of educational and training proposals linked to the educational field, thereby supporting the continued development of social work within institutional educational contexts.

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Appendix 1

I. Personal-professional data

In the following questions, please mark the option that applies with an X. where a Numerical value is required, please write it in the space provided

01.GENDER	MALE		FEMALE		OTHER	
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02.AGE	
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03.PROFESSIONAL STATUS	A. TEACHER/PROFESSIONAL		B. STUDENT	
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If you answered 03. A. TEACHER / PROFESSIONAL

03.A.1.UNIVERSITY DEGREE	SOCIAL WORK		TEACHER		SOCIAL EDUCATION		PSYCHOLOGY		PEDAGOGY		OTHER	
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03.A.2.YEARS OF TEACHING / PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	
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03.A.3.FUNCTION OR ROLE	TEACHER/ MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM TUTOR		SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM		GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR		SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF		SUPPORT TEACHER /SPECIAL EDUCATION	
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03.A.4.TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER		PRIMARY SCHOOL		SECONDARY SCHOOL		PRIVATE OR STATE-FUNDED PRIVATE SCHOOL	
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03.A.5.EDUCATIONAL STAGE IN WHICH YOU WORK	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION		PRIMARY EDUCATION		COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION		UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION		VOCATIONAL TRAINING	
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If you answered 03. B, STUDENT

03.B.1. UNIVERSITY DEGREE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN	SOCIAL WORK		TEACHING		SOCIAL EDUCATION		PSYCHOLOGY		PEDAGOGY		OTHER	
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03.B.1. CURRENT YEAR OF STUDY	1st		2nd		3rd		4th	
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II. Assessment of social worker competencies in educational institutions

Below is a CATALOG OF COMPETENCIES THAT, ACCORDING TO DIFFERENT SOURCES, MAY BE CONSIDERED CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. You are asked to **RATE the importance/necessity that, in your opinion, each of these professional competencies has** for the potential performance of social work in educational settings. Said rating should be given on a **scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = IRRELEVANT/not necessary at all, and 5 = very important/absolutely necessary**. Please, **MARK WITH AN X** the box corresponding to the rating you choose for each proposed competence.

SOCIAL WORKER COMPETENCIES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	RATING				
1. Designing prevention programs related to drug addiction, sex education, sexually transmitted diseases, and values education, among others.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Identifying and addressing problems that hinder students' academic performance, both in the school and family environment.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Analyzing parents' expectations regarding their children's potential, as well as those placed on the school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Advising families when requested, or when the social worker considers it necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Advising teachers on factors that influence students' academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Guiding and advising teaching staff, both at group and individual level, when requested or when the social worker deems it appropriate, in order to improve their educational practice.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Coordinating, together with the professional team (educational psychologist and psychologist), the implementation of parent education programs.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Organizing conferences, talks or meetings aimed at helping teachers better understand students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Establishing coordination with different social welfare institutions in order to refer cases when necessary (family welfare services, social services, family courts, juvenile courts).	1	2	3	4	5
10. Attending cases referred to by school management or teaching staff, as well as those in which students or their families request guidance.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Participating in the academic council as a representative of the guidance department.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Collaborating in the development of cultural and recreational programs that benefit students.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Informing teaching staff about relevant aspects of students' socio-family situation that should be taken into account.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Advising students on study habits and the organization of their free time.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Processing and analyzing school absenteeism records provided by educational institutions.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Participating in evaluation and promotion committees to collaborate in the analysis of special cases.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Requesting support from parents' associations for the implementation of projects or events that benefit any sector of the educational community.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Monitoring cases involving families in special circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Working to raise families' awareness of their role as educational agents in the child's development.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Preparing students' social records/files.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Developing projects aimed at teachers' wellbeing and personal development.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Analyzing the socio-economic situation of students applying for scholarships or financial aid.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Intervening when risk factors affecting the child are detected at the family level.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Providing career guidance to students planning to pursue vocational education and training.	1	2	3	4	5