

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG ADULTS: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

SEBASTIAN VAIDA¹

ABSTRACT. One method to define a concept is to extract its definitions from multiple studies and models. In the present study, we used this qualitative approach to define the concept of social-emotional development in young adults, with all its facets. Based on specific keywords, we found over 400 articles concerning these concepts and, with specific criteria, narrowed it down to 30 studies. We then found very specific definitions for social-emotional competences, social competences and emotional ones. In the end, we found important similarities and differences between two intertwined concepts, emotional intelligence and social-emotional competence, with a wide range of applications.

Keywords: *social-emotional development, emotional intelligence, social competences.*

ABSTRAKT. Eine Methode, um ein Konzept zu definieren ist, seine Definitionen von mehreren Studien und Modelle extrahieren. In der vorliegenden Studie verwendeten wir diesen qualitativen Ansatz das Konzept der sozial-emotionalen Entwicklung bei jungen Erwachsenen zu definieren, mit all seinen Facetten. Basierend auf bestimmten Schlüsselwörtern, fanden wir mehr als 400 Artikel, diese Konzepte unterlegt und mit bestimmten Kriterien, verengt es bis zu 30 Studien nach unten. Wir fanden dann sehr spezifische Definitionen für sozial-emotionale Kompetenzen, soziale Kompetenzen und emotionale. Am Ende fanden wir wichtige Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen zwei miteinander verflochten Konzepte, emotionale Intelligenz und sozial-emotionale Kompetenz, mit einer breiten Palette von Anwendungen.

Stichwort: *sozial-emotionale Entwicklung, emotionale Intelligenz, soziale Kompetenzen*

¹ Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Email: sebastianvaida@psychology.ro

Introduction

Social and Emotional development represents the process of developing and supporting social-emotional competences and skills in a proper environment and with the correct learning experiences. This process focuses on active learning techniques and learning skills that offer the opportunity to develop new abilities, behaviors and thinking processes that help young adults become healthy and competent members of the society (Elias & al., 1997).

Studies conducted so far in this area (Goleman & al., 2002; Ciarrocchi & al., 2002, 2003; Durlak & al., 2010, 2011; CASEL, 2013; Seal & al., 2010), identified five areas of social-emotional competences, essential for the correct development of young adults, that will help them reach their full potential: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and orientation towards change.

Although there are several large studies and meta-analyses concerning the concept of social-emotional development (CASEL, 1997, 2003, 2013) from early ages to adolescence, there are only few ones regarding young adults (Flowers, 2005; Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2007; Castejon & al., 2008; Harrison & Fopma-Loy, 2010; Kotsou & al., 2011; Stewart & Chisholm, 2012; Seal & al., 2011, 2012).

The concept of social-emotional development is mostly used for the undergraduate population, for children and adolescents (Elias, 2003; Zins & al., 2004; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), while the one of emotional intelligence is more present in the business-organizational environment (Goleman & al., 2002). The concept of social-emotional competence development has been studied more thoroughly in the last 20 years, referring to young adults, both for student population (Seal & al., 2011, 2012) or non-student (Boyatzis, 2007). Because there are so many definitions for the concept of social-emotional competences, there are still many difficulties when it comes to using it in educational programs addressed to young adults in general or students in particular. Therefore, a conceptual clarification is required that can allow successful designs and implementations of interventions for targeted groups.

Unlike other dimensions like general intelligence or personality, which can be developed mainly in childhood and remain relatively stable in adulthood, competences can be improved through the learning process throughout life (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, some authors believe that the development of social-emotional competences is justified at any age and for any target group (Seal, Boyatzis & Bailey, 2006).

According to Seal (2011), the concept of social-emotional competences development is an integration of several theories on social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920; Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985), emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; 1998) and competences development (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993) applied in education.

The first concept in this unifying approach is the one of social intelligence, which can be defined as the ability to understand others, to manage social interactions and contexts (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985; Thorndike, 1920). Thorndike (1920) stated that social intelligence can be analyzed as a triad: (1) abstract or academic intelligence, or the ability to understand and use ideas; (2) mechanic or visual-spatial intelligence or the ability to manipulate objects; (3) practical or social intelligence, or the ability to adapt in the society and social interactions.

The second concept is an umbrella term, highly used in organizations as well as academia – emotional intelligence. Ever since it appeared back in 1985, it stirred a high attention among researchers and managers, which can be seen in the exponential growing number of books and studies. If we attempt a clarification of the concept, we are left with three main models: (1) emotional traits model (Bar-On, 1988), (2) emotional abilities model (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), model recommended by some authors (Oberst & al., 2009) for educational programs and (3) emotional competences model (Goleman, 1995), recommended by the same authors in the organizational area.

The third concept is the one of generic competences, a study field initiated by Boyatzis (1982). Competences are that set of inter-related behaviors that are organized based on an intent and that lead to success and excellent results (Boyatzis, 2009). Training programs based on developing social-emotional competences bring value to organizations (Spencer, 2001). Studies show that there are significant improvements in social-emotional competences when trainings and interventions are clear and well-targeted (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002), proving that these can be developed in almost any target group, at any age (Seal, Boyatzis & Bailey, 2006).

Integrating these three approaches, Seal (2010) suggested a new concept, the one of social-emotional competences development, applied to young adults and particularly to students. Seal justifies the construction of a new model of social-emotional competences development and also an instrument for measuring these competences based on a low number of studies for this target group and lack of instruments. The present tests (MSCEIT, EQ-i, etc.) measure similar concepts such as emotional intelligence and the costs of using such instruments are huge and cannot be used on a large scale with many participants, such as student's evaluations.

The model suggested by Seal (2010) includes four distinct, yet inter-related factors:

- (1) self-awareness, which means recognizing and understanding one's emotional state, evaluating strengths and weaknesses and recognizing preferences;
- (2) respect towards others, namely considering other's opinions and anticipating consequences before acting;
- (3) connecting with others, or the ease or effort needed to build strong and significant relations with others;
- (4) orientation towards change, or the intention to self-change or changing others.

Self-awareness is also defined as knowing and understanding your own emotional states, evaluating your strengths and limitations and recognizing your preferences. It includes three categories: (a) emotional self-awareness, (b) correct self-evaluation and (c) identification of tendencies. Emotional self-awareness has two sub factors: knowing what you feel and knowing why you feel what you feel. The correct self-evaluation also has two sub factors: the talent part, or the correct evaluation of your strengths and the limitations part, or the correct evaluation of your weaknesses. Again, the identification of tendencies has two sub factors as well: closeness, or knowing your preferences and avoidance, or knowing what you dislike Seal, 2010).

Respect towards others include empathy and self-monitoring and is seen as the care and concern towards people and situations, done before acting, to avoid hurting those people. Empathy has two sub factors: understanding the way others feel and understanding the importance of others. Self-monitoring as well has two sub factors: anticipating consequences and thinking before acting or speaking. This factor can moderate the ability to recognize or understand the perspective others have, in order to interact better or avoid and solve conflicts (Colby & Sullivan, 2009).

Connection to others focuses on building significant relations and represents the regulation dimension of the model. The concept of connection includes sociability and intimacy and is understood as the ease or difficulty in developing good, quality relations with others, by exchanging ideas and feelings. Sociability involves two aspects: the comfort in building relations and the effort in keeping them working. Intimacy involves communicating thoughts and feelings and the level of trust and honesty.

Orientation towards change focuses on positively influencing others and represents the dimension of task regulation within the model. It is defined as the propensity to influence others in finding opportunities and the motivation for change. It includes initiative and inspiration, each with two sub factors. Initiative involves taking lead and the passion to coordinate groups. Inspiration involves the motivation to inspire others and the trust to coordinate others (Seal, 2010).

This model, as an integrative one, offers the theoretical frame to understand young adult's emotions and behaviors, and it is ideal for planning and implementing personal development programs for improving social-emotional competences. It can be used both as a diagnostic tool for evaluating the level of social-emotional competences on each factor and as a development instrument. Based on this model, one can create a long term plan for developing young adults competences on all four factors.

Methodology

To define the concept of social-emotional competences development, we relied on the studies published between 1990 and 2012, identified with several keywords: competence/competences/competency, social emotional, social competences, emotional competences, young adults, young adulthood, university students, higher education. We searched articles from the following data bases: APA Psych Info, Science Direct, Sage Pub, Ebsco, Elsevier, ProQuest and Springer Link.

Inclusion-exclusion criteria

From a number of over 400 studies that we found on a first search based on the previously mentioned keywords, we then applied three criteria, to refine the results.

A first criterion was the year the articles were published. In a first stage we searched for those articles that appeared from 1990 till 2012, because 1990 was the year the concept of emotional intelligence was first published in a scientific journal. In all fairness, the first mentioning of the concept of emotional intelligence was in 1985, in a PhD research, but in the five years that followed, no other noticeable study was done. We then decided to narrow the period of time, because the studies that focused on both emotional intelligence and social-emotional competences only appeared in the beginning of the year 2000.

A second criterion was the age category that the concepts referred to. Thus, we eliminated the studies that analyzed social-emotional development in children.

And a third criterion was for the articles to belong to scientific journals (not books), peer reviewed, with a detailed analysis of the results and the study.

Data analysis

After applying these criteria, we were left with a number of 30 studies, which we carefully analyzed to extract the relevant information for the purpose of this research.

Of a total of 30 articles, 4 articles (13%) discussed the concept of social competences, 15 articles (50%) talked about emotional competences and 11 articles (37%) were about social-emotional competences.

Competences are defined as being the description of the learning results, namely what a person knows or can prove to have learned, following a learning process (Oberst & al., 2009). As for the old polemics between intelligence and competence, the latter refers to the set of skills involved in solving problems in the personal and professional area, while the former involves subcomponents of these skills, present in the general form of thinking and understanding (Sternberg, 1985).

Conceptual Analysis

Social competences are defined as the ability to successfully get involved in social and interpersonal relations, such as the ability to interpret verbal or nonverbal messages (Larson & al., 2007). There is an increasing body of research in the study of social development as a marker of psychosocial functioning of young adults, thus proving a higher interest of the scientific community.

In a larger approach, Topping, Bremner & Holmes (2000) defines social competences as the ability to integrate thoughts, emotions and behaviors so that social results can be valued in a certain context or culture. This way, a person that has good social competences is able to control one's emotions and behaviors, to achieve the desired results, in a large array of contexts.

Although social competence is a larger and more generic term, it is often equaled to the one of social skills which, normally, refers to specific behaviors, either verbal or nonverbal, such as eye contact, voice tonality or even more general behaviors such as assertiveness (Oberst & al., 2009). At a closer look, we see that there is a fine difference between social competences and social skills and that the two concepts are not identical (Black & Ornelles, 2001). Skills are specific abilities needed to perform in a certain task (McFall, 1982), and social skills are measurable interpersonal behaviors. Competences, on the other hand, are more general and measure the general performance in a certain task (Black, 2001). Therefore, social competences include more general behaviors and responses, with a very interpersonal nature.

Starting from Thorndike's (1920) definition on social competence as the ability to act wisely in human relations, Smart & Sanson (2003) define the concept as referring to the range of socially appropriate behaviors and responses such as cooperation, initiation of relations, interaction with others, conflict resolution or helping others. Four factors become transparent in this approach: assertiveness, self-control, responsibility and empathy. In terms of

relating social competences with other factors, it was shown that people with high social competences tend to feel less depressed, anxious or stressed. Also, they get involved in less antisocial behaviors and, in general, are more satisfied with their life achievements (Smart & Sanson, 2003). As time passes by, the stability of social competences lowers, proving once again the need for developing these competences at all ages, for the entire life span.

In the attempt to understand and define *emotional competences*, Seal & Andrews-Brown (2010) begin from the approaches on emotional intelligence. There are nowadays tenths of thousands of articles on emotional intelligence, in one context or another, or related to other psychological concepts. In essence though, there are three main approaches, and the studies about the concept of emotional intelligence fall in one of these three categories.

The first perspective is the one of emotional quotient (EQ), developed by Bar-On, which focuses on the general wellbeing, measured with the Eqi, Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997).

The second approach is developed by Mayer & Salovey (1990), which focuses on emotional abilities, measured with MSCEIT (Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) (Mayer & al., 2000).

And the third view is the one developed by Goleman (1995), centered on behaviors that lead to performance, measured with ECI (Emotional Competence Inventory) (Boyatzis & Goleman, 2002).

In other words, Bar-On suggests a model of emotional coefficient, Mayer & Salovey propose a model of emotional abilities and Goleman a model of emotional competences. Reuniting these three approaches, Seal (2010) suggests a more integrative model which can offer a better understanding of the concept of emotional intelligence and its role in the development of emotional competences. Seal considers that a possible solution to this never ending debate is to treat the concept as a holistic one. In this view, the emotional abilities moderate the relation between the emotional traits and the active emotional competences, in order to identify and regulate one's and others' emotions for a successful adaptation to the environment.

To eliminate the possible confusions that might arise between emotional intelligence and emotional competences, Goleman (1998) shows that emotional competences are rooted in emotional intelligence, but they are a developed ability that leads to special results. In other words, people have the potential of emotional intelligence, but also need to learn how to develop their emotional competences. This way, emotional intelligence is at the base of emotional competences, which are, in turn, antecedents to performance. This proves that the mere presence of emotional intelligence is not enough. This means that people with a high emotional intelligence have the capacity to learn and develop certain competences not that those competences have been developed too. As an

analogy, Goleman suggested the idea of musical education, where some people are born with an incredible voice but without a proper training and musical education, they will never become outstanding singers. Confirming Goleman's studies, Abraham (2004) claims that emotional intelligence is really a predictor of performance when it acts through emotional competences. This is why, explains the author, many researches made on organizations and institutions found little or no contribution of emotional intelligence to overall performance ((Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002).

On the same idea, Wakeman (2006) suggests that emotional competences cannot exist without the factors of emotional intelligence, which support the development of these competences. A person who is capable of emotion regulation has the possibility to develop an emotional competence in self-discipline. Similarly, a person who can correctly identify his/her emotions has the possibility to develop an emotional competence in empathy or conflict management. In both cases, it's clear that emotional intelligence factors offer the elements for developing emotional competences. Wakeman (2006) suggested that a person's level of emotional intelligence can be assessed in a certain degree by measuring the emotional competences developed by that person.

Oberst & al. (2009) considers emotional competences to be the individual differences that appear while doing emotions management and solving emotional problems (Ciarrocchi & Scott, 2006) and emotional intelligence to be the ability to perceive correctly one's and others' emotions in order to facilitate thinking and understand and control emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Ciarrocchi & Scott (2006) avoid using the term of emotional intelligence because they consider that, for a concept to be considered intelligence, it should be measured with an ability test with "right" or "wrong" answers. Wang & al. (2011) differentiates emotional intelligence from emotional competence motivating that the first is somewhat innate, while the latter can be learned and developed, thus confirming previous studies (Goleman, 1998).

Social emotional competences. To understand and define social-emotional competences in students, we should start from the main roles of the higher education institutions: (a) preparing professionals on specific domains; (b) doing impact, innovative and up to date researches and (c) developing "cultivated" people. In this view, Ortega refers to culture in a broad sense, which involves values and a global vision. This way, the educational functions of the higher education institutions can be summarized as transmitting knowledge, procedures/techniques and attitudes. In other words, "knowing", "doing" and "being" (Oberst & al., 2009). The last dimension, the attitude, includes inter and intrapersonal competences which, also include social and emotional competences.

Trying to develop social-emotional competences with young adults, Seal & al. (2011) suggested a new model, based on the theories of social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920; Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985), emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1988; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; 1998) and theories of competence development (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). This model is organized on two dimensions and it includes four distinct factors: self-awareness, considering others, connection with others and impact changes. The two dimensions of the model focus on recognizing one's and others' emotions (for the first two factors) and regulating relations and tasks (for the last two factors). The model can be used either as a diagnostic tool, with the possibility to evaluate competences on each factor or as a development instrument, allowing the identification of strengths and weaknesses. According to the theory of self-directed change, learning appears when one can notice the difference between the present level of development and the desired level (Boyatzis, 1994; 2006; Taylor, 2006). this way, once identified the competences on each factor, one can design and implement an efficient development plan.

For a better understanding of these three concepts (social competences, emotional competences and social-emotional competences, as referred to young adults), we present a summary of the definitions depicted from the selection of the 30 articles previously mentioned:

Table 1. Definitions of social competence, emotional competence, and social-emotional competence.

Social competences

Definition	Reference
<i>Social competence refers to those behaviors and answers with an interpersonal nature.</i>	Black & Ornelles, 2001
<i>A learned modality of behaving, that is socially accepted and allows efficient interaction with other persons.</i>	Smart & Sanson, 2003
<i>The ability to successfully get involved in social interactions and interpersonal relations, as well as the ability to correctly interpret verbal and nonverbal messages.</i>	Larson, Whitton, Hauser & Allen, 2007
<i>A way to build and manage social relations in a certain context.</i>	Murakami, Murray, Sims & Chedzey, 2009

Emotional competences

Definition	Reference
<i>Individual differences concerning how efficient people control their emotions and emotional problems.</i>	Ciarrochi, Deane & Anderson, 2002
<i>Those competences that, based on emotional intelligence, predict performance.</i>	Abraham, 2004

<i>Self-awareness (emotional awareness, self-trust), self-management (emotional control, trust, adaptability, optimism, initiative), social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness), relations management (developing others, leadership, communication, conflict management, teamwork, collaboration). Interpersonal abilities and skills, adaptability and stress management, that can lead to academic success.</i>	Offermann, Bailey, Vasilopoulos, Seal, Sass, 2004
<i>The ability to identify, use and make a proper management of emotions.</i>	Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, Majeski, 2004
<i>A category of skills that relates to a proper management of internal emotions, external situations and relations, all promoting mental health.</i>	Drago, 2004
<i>The ability to perceive emotions, access and generate emotions, understand and regulate them in order to promote intellectual and emotional development.</i>	Flowers, 2005
<i>The way that a person manages his/her emotions in daily life situations or at work.</i>	Wakeman, 2006
<i>The ability to reason upon emotions and control them in order to improve thinking.</i>	Seal, Andrews-Brown, 2010
<i>Individual differences in identifying, expressing, understanding, regulating and using emotions.</i>	Harrison & Fopma-Loy, 2010
<i>The ability to identify, understand, express and control one's and other's emotions.</i>	Nelis, Kotsou, Quoidbach, Hansenne, Weytens, Dupuis, Mikolajczak, 2011 Kotsou, Nelis, Gregoire, Mikolajczak, 2011
Social-emotional competences	
Definition	Reference
<i>Competences that lead to learning, interpersonal development and increase academic potential.</i>	Liff, 2003
<i>Set of skills involved in achieving performance or solving personal or professional problems.</i>	Castejon, Cantero & Perez, 2008
<i>Description of the learning results (what a person knows or can prove, as a result of a learning process).</i>	Oberst, Gallifa, Farriols & Villaregut, 2009
<i>Personal ability to use emotional information, behaviors and traits, to facilitate socially desirable results.</i>	Seal, Naumann, Scott & Royce-Davis, 2011
<i>A way of monitoring, discriminating and using emotional information to facilitate thinking.</i>	Galal, Carr-Lopez, Seal, Scott, & Lopez, 2012
<i>Improvement of personal abilities for a proper management to the environment challenges.</i>	Seal, Beauchamp, Miguel, Scott, Naumann, Dong & Galal, 2012
<i>Abilities like self-motivation and frustration tolerance, impulse control and delaying rewards, empathy.</i>	Stewart & Chisholm, 2012
<i>Product of emotional development and social learning, that can happen in an educational frame.</i>	Wang, Wilhite, Wyatt, Young, Bloemker & Wilhite, 2012

Conclusions

As a result of this theoretical analysis of the concept of social-emotional competences development in young adults, we can draw a series of useful conclusions.

First and foremost, it is clear that the concepts of emotional intelligence and social-emotional competence are closely linked both in theory and applications (Goleman, 1998; Seal & Andrews-Brown, 2010; Wang & al., 2011). Probably this close relation led to the difficulties in defining the concepts and seldom considering them as similar or even identical (Nelis & al., 2011).

Second, we found a conceptual difference between the two terms. Emotional intelligence represents a set of innate factors (Goleman, 1998), while social-emotional competences can be developed (Spencer, 2001; Boyatzis & al., 2002). Prerequisites like emotional intelligence are certainly necessary but not sufficient. This way, we can explain why emotional intelligence can have little or no contribution over general performance (Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002) and why it becomes a good predictor only when it acts through social-emotional competences (Abraham, 2004). Therefore, we can state that emotional intelligence is at the base of emotional competences (Goleman, 1989), which are antecedents of performance. Worth being noticed is the fact that a high level of emotional intelligence does not guarantee success and performance, unless social-emotional competences are developed too.

Third, we noticed that the development of social-emotional competences can be done based on the understanding and development of emotional intelligence. The clarifications brought by Seal & Andrews-Brown (2010) are very important, because they present the three main models existing in the scientific literature and offer an integrative model. The two authors suggest that emotional intelligence should be analyzed as a holistic construct, where emotional abilities moderate the relation between emotional traits and emotional competences. From a wide range of definitions for the analyzed concepts, we extracted the following four as working definitions:

a) competences are the capacity to adopt the behaviors that lead to performance.

b) social competences represent the ability to control the behaviors and responses that have an interpersonal nature, with the intent of building successful relations, in a wide array of contexts.

c) emotional competences are based on emotional intelligence and imply an emotional management (identify, express, understand, regulate and use of emotions) and predict performance in a personal and professional level.

d) social-emotional competences are a product of emotional development and social learning (what one knows or can prove to have learned), that lead to improvements in inter or intrapersonal relations and personal or professional performance.

We found that competences can be improved through learning (Kolb, 1984) and that social-emotional competences are highly necessary (Flowers, 2005; Harrison & Fopma-Loy, 2010; Galal & al., 2012) and bring significant improvements both socially (Nelis, 2011) and physically, in the form of stress reduction (Kotsou, 2011).

In summary, some of the conclusions of this theoretical review state that competences can be developed at any age and social-emotional competences fit this rule. The development of these competences has proven to have many benefits and is a necessity in the present world. On the plus side, there are many theoretical models that can be used to design and implement long term programs for social-emotional competences development for young adults. The link between social-emotional competences and emotional intelligence is an interdependent one; based on emotional intelligence, social-emotional competences can be developed and lead to personal and professional performance. And, last but not least, social-emotional competences are a product of emotional development and social learning, which lead to improvements and performance.

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