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**SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPING
EMOTIONAL ABILITIES IN ADOLESCENTS: A SYSTEMATIC
REVIEW**

Alexandra Chiş (a)*, Alina S. Rusu (a,b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Doctoral School Education, Reflection, Development, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, 7 Sindicatelor St., Cluj-Napoca, Romania, chis.alexandra@ubbonline.ubbcluj.ro

(b) Department of Special Education, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, 7 Sindicatelor St., Cluj-Napoca, Romania, alinasimonarusu@gmail.com

Abstract

There is a growing body of empirical literature on factors related to school performance and school completion in children and adolescents. Emotional intelligence (EI) abilities were repeatedly associated with school performance and several social and behavioural outcomes in adolescence. Previous studies suggest that emotional abilities trainings in educational setting may have multidimensional positive effects on individual functioning. The present study reviews the available evaluation studies (from 2000 to 2018) of school-based interventions targeting to develop students' emotional abilities. Overall, the current analysis sought to identify particular aspects related to intervention effects and intervention design addressing the EI abilities, such as: targeted population, theoretical framework of the intervention, program content, etc. Quasi-experimental evaluation studies of the effects of school-based EI development programs were searched in several scientific databases based on specific keywords. The identified studies were filtered according to a list of inclusion criteria, such as the participants-related characteristics (e.g. early, middle or late adolescents, 11 to 19 years old students), emotional intelligence dimensions addressed by the interventions (*i.e.* overall emotional intelligence or individual abilities) and other aspects. A number of 13 studies met the inclusion criteria and were further analyzed. Results and recommendations for the further development of intervention programs addressing the emotional abilities of adolescent students are discussed in this paper.

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Keywords: Emotional abilities development, adolescence, school-based.



1. Introduction

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) was first introduced as "*the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions*" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189). Over the years, the definition of EI was further revised (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016) and numerous studies have validated EI as a standard intelligence concept (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001; MacCann, Joseph, Newman, & Roberts, 2014). Moreover, a growing body of research reported that EI abilities are linked to a variety of outcomes, such as psycho-social development indicators (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012), behavioural outcomes (Trinidad, Unger, Chou, & Johnson, 2004), social skills (Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Supavadeepravit, 2008), educational outcomes (Gil-Olarte Márquez, Palomera Martín, & Brackett, 2006; MacCann, Fogarty, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2011), etc.

Considering the emotional abilities from a developmental perspective, previous research suggested a decline in emotional self-regulation capacities in middle adolescence (*i.e.* 14 to 18 years), which may explain, at some extent, the occurrence of several negative developmental outcomes during these years (Bakracevic, Vukman, & Licardo, 2010). However, a large body of research indicates that emotional abilities can be developed or enhanced through specific interventions (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012).

The school settings were described as propitious environments for developing EI abilities (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Hence, an increasing number of pre-university and higher education institutions from several countries have become interested in integrating emotional abilities training within schools (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012; Wigelsworth, Humphrey, & Lendrum, 2013).

2. Problem Statement

Although several individual studies found positive multidimensional effects of school-based emotional abilities development programs (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011), some practitioners in the field of education questioned the efficiency of adding such programs, given the laden curricular content and the limited time resources (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002). Hence, in this study we will review the studies addressing the evaluation (outputs and outcomes) of school-based interventions targeting to develop students' emotional abilities, focusing on interventions' effects and program's characteristics.

3. Research Questions

Overall, this analysis of the literature sought to identify the following aspects related to the EI school-based intervention programs:

- 1) Which are the intervention effects reported by the evaluation studies?
- 2) What are the aims of emotional abilities trainings/development programs in school settings?
- 3) What kind of population was targeted by the intervention programs (*i.e.* general school population/at risk students)?

- 4) What type of emotional abilities are addressed by the identified intervention programs (*i.e.* overall emotional intelligence/particular emotional abilities)?
- 5) What types of activities are included in the intervention programs targeting to develop the adolescent students' emotional abilities?
- 6) How is the program delivered to the students (*i.e.* implementation personnel, frequency and duration of the intervention sessions)?
- 7) Which are the underlying theoretical models of the interventions?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the empirical literature on school-based programs aiming to develop adolescent students' EI abilities. The first aim is to summarize the effects of school-based EI development programs. The second aim of the study is to highlight key features related to program design and implementation, such as: theoretical frameworks of the interventions, program aims, implementation characteristics, etc. Hence, the results may have practical implications concerning the development and implementation of further school-based EI abilities development programs.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Procedure

Systematic searches for evaluation studies of intervention programs were conducted in several scientific databases, as it follows: Taylor & Francis, Wiley Journals 2016, SCOPUS, EBSCO Host, Web of Science, Science Direct, ERIC, Springer Link Journals. Key-words combinations from four categories of words were entered in order to identify the relevant literature for this analysis, as it follows: (1) *emotional intelligence, emotional abilities*, (2) *adolescents, adolescence*, (3) *school setting, educational setting* and (4) *program, intervention*.

5.2. Inclusion criteria

Quasi-experimental studies published from 2000 to 2018, which evaluated the effects of school-based interventions targeting emotional abilities development in adolescent samples (*i.e.* 11 to 19 years old), were included in the analysis. Only the full text access studies written in English were retained for the present analysis.

6. Findings

The systematic searches based on the key-words combinations led to the identification of 15512 studies. The study titles and abstracts were inspected and a number of 48 studies were identified as relevant to the present analysis. Duplicates have been removed (*i.e.* 6 research papers). Furthermore, studies conducted on 1st to 12th grade students (e.g. Bavarian et al., 2013) were excluded, as this study is focused on the effects of the interventions in adolescent students' samples. In addition, studies conducted in special education institutions (e.g. study 3, presented in Merrell, Juskelis, Tran & Buchanan, 2008) were excluded. Thirteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were retained for the analysis. The results are summarized below and in Table 1.

6.1. Intervention effects reported by the evaluation studies

The analyzed studies (N=13) reported roughly unanimously positive effects of emotional abilities development programs on adolescents, such as: higher levels of emotional skills (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011), increased school performance (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012), enhanced psychosocial functioning (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012), higher levels of social skills (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson, & Pope, 2007), etc. (Table 1). One study found statistically insignificant intervention effects on several behavioural and emotional functioning indicators (Wigelsworth, Humphrey, & Lendrum, 2013).

Tabel 01. Intervention programs' characteristics summary (N=13)

Study	Program's objectives	Participants/ location	Program content	Theoretical framework	Program Length	Delivering members	Implementation effects
Brackett, Rivers, Reyes & Salovey (2012)	Develop the socio-emotional skills Improve students' school performance	General school population Public school 5 th -6 th grade U.S.A	Examples of activities: - emotional vocabulary (i.e. introducing words designating emotional states) - generating links between the new emotional word and ongoing events from the real life - extending learning at home by discussing the new emotional words - emotional regulation techniques	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2005)	One school year	Teachers	Increased school performance Enhanced social and emotional skills Increased adaptability Increased quality of relationships Decreased attention or learning issues
Coelho, Marchante & Sousa (2015)	Develop students' socio-emotional skills and students' self-esteem	General school population Public school 7 th -9 th grade Portugal	Activities targeting self-awareness, social consciousness, emotional management, interpersonal skills, etc.	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2005)	Three school years Twelve weeks per year One hour weekly sessions	Psychologists	Increased levels of social consciousness Lower levels of isolation Lower levels of social anxiety
Castillo, Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal & Balluerka (2013)	Develop abilities Promote intellectual growth	General school population Public school 7 th -9 th grade Spain	Group activities, such as: - games - role playing - projects - media content-based learning activities	The four branches model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Two school years Twelve sessions each year One hour sessions	Teachers Psychologists	Lower frequency of aggressive behaviours Higher levels of empathy in males Lower levels of personal distress in males
Castillo-Gualda, Cabello, Herrero, Rodríguez-Carvajal & Fernández-Berrocal (2018)	Develop abilities (perceiving/using/ understanding/ managing emotions)	General school population Public and private schools 11 to 15 years old students Spain	The content of the intervention is not detailed in this study (for details see Castillo, Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal & Balluerka, 2013)	The four branches model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Three school years Twelve annual sessions One hour sessions	Psychologists	Decreased negative affect and aggressive behaviours
Dougherty & Sharkey (2017)	Decrease the negative effects of risk factors Prevent school drop out	Students at risk for school abandonment Public school 12 to 17 years old students USA	Two types of activities: - daily classes activities - community-based activities: excursions, school clubs, drug abuse prevention activities	Learning and control theories (see Eggert, Thompson, Herting & Randall, 2001)	One semester Daily 50 minutes sessions	Teachers Psychologists	Increased school performance
Di Fabio & Kenny (2011)	Develop the EI abilities	General school population Senior high school students Italy	The individual sessions addressed one of the four branches of EI, as described by Mayer & Salovey (1997): perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions and managing emotions.	The four branches model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Four sessions Two and a half hours weekly sessions	N/A	Increased levels of EI Decreased perceived indecision Decreased decision-making difficulties related to career choice
Garaigordobil & Peña-	Develop EI	General school population	The activities were grouped into five	The four branches model of EI	One school year	Researcher in the field of	Increased EI Developed conflict

Sarrionandia (2015)		Public and private schools 13 to 16 years old students Spain	different modules , such as (Garaigordobil & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015, p.5): “Emotion regulation”, “ General status”, “Empathy”, etc.	(Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Twenty sessions One hour sessions	psychology	resolution strategies
Cramer & Castro-Olivo (2016)	Develop socio-emotional skills Improve students’ resilience Decrease internalization symptoms	Culturally and linguistically diverse students Public school 9 th -10 th grade USA	A socio-emotional learning curriculum, comprising activities targeting understanding emotions, positive thinking, anger management, etc.	Socio-emotional learning (see Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004)	Six weeks Twelve sessions Maximum 50 minutes per session	Trained staff	Higher levels of socio-emotional skills Increased student resilience
Merrell, Juskelis, Tran & Buchanan (2008) – 2 nd study	Prevent negative educational outcomes Promote positive development Prevent maladaptive behaviours	General school population Public school 7 th -8 th grade USA	Curriculum-based program Content: initial testing, enhancing emotional vocabulary, anger management, modifying cognitive errors, stress reduction strategies, linking emotion and behaviour	Socio-emotional learning (see Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004)	Three months Fifty minutes weekly sessions	Teachers	Increased socio-emotional abilities Developed coping strategies Fewer negative social and emotional symptoms
Wigelsworth, Humphrey & Lendrum (2013)	Promote overall students’ mental health Develop socio-emotional skills	General school population Public school Junior high school students England	The program comprised lessons on social and emotional abilities which promoted an overall positive learning environment	EI theory (Goleman, 1996)	Two school years	Teachers	No statistically significant effects of the intervention
Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope (2007)	Develop EI Ease students’ school transition	General school population Public school 11 to 12 years old students England	Previously trained 10 th grade students became mentors for their 7 th grade colleagues The mentees received a book on socio-emotional skills and the mentors received a game called “cool cards” which implies discussing different emotion-infused situations	Mixed model of EI (Bar-On & Parker, 2000)	One school year	Trainers Local authorities Students (10 th and 7 th graders)	Increased EI Eased school transition process Increased school competence Higher levels of social skills
Ruiz-Aranda et al. (2012)	Prevent aggressive behaviours Prevent negative psychosocial outcomes Promote students’ mental health	General school population Public school 12 to 17 years old students Spain	Examples of activities: - learning the physical cues of different emotions - enhancing students’ emotional vocabulary via games - discussing emotional management techniques	The four branches model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Two years Six months each year Twenty four weekly sessions/ year	Psychologists	Positive effects on students’ mental health Lower levels of negative affect Decreased anxiety symptoms Lower levels of social distress Lower levels of depression
Ruiz-Aranda, Salguero, Cabello, Palomera, & Berrocal (2012)	Develop students’ EI skills Promote psychosocial adaptation	General school population Public school 13 to 16 years old students Spain	Details on the structure of the program are available in Ruiz-Aranda, Fernández-Berrocal, Cabello & Salguero (2008)	The four branches model of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997)	Ten weekly one hour sessions	Trained personnel	Lower anxiety levels Decreased levels of social stress Higher levels of self-esteem

6.2. Identified aims of the school-based emotional abilities development programs

Several studies included in the analysis investigated the effects of programs aiming to develop students’ EI within schools (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Castillo, Salguero, Fernández-Berrocal, & Balluerka, 2013). Other studies evaluated the effects of interventions targeting to develop students’ EI abilities in relation to school performance (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012), school dropout prevention (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017), or students’ psycho-social functioning (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012).

6.3. Targeted population of the intervention programs

Most of the identified programs targeted the general school population (see Table 1). Only two studies out of the 13 included in the analysis investigated the effects of an emotional abilities training in a culturally diverse sample of students (Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016), respectively in a drop out prone students' sample (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017).

6.4. Emotional abilities addressed by the identified intervention programs

Several intervention programs described in the analyzed studies proposed to develop the overall emotional intelligence, either as an explicit aim of the intervention (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson, & Pope, 2007; Garaigordobil & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015), or as a mechanism for acquiring positive effects on the psycho-social, behavioural or educational outcomes of the students (Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012; Merrell, Juskelis, Tran, & Buchanan, 2008). Other programs have addressed social and emotional skills in a combined manner (Wigelsworth, Humphrey, & Lendrum, 2013; Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016).

6.5. Activities comprised by the intervention programs

The intervention programs described in the analyzed studies (N=13) have covered both formal learning activities, delivered in classrooms (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Coelho, Marchante & Sousa, 2015; Merrell, Juskelis, Tran, & Buchanan, 2008), as well as non-formal activities, such as community-based activities (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017) or mentoring activities (Qualter, Whiteley, Hutchinson & Pope, 2007). Some examples of programs' content are provided in Table 1.

6.6. Program delivery characteristics

Programs structured as curriculum-based interventions (Merrell, Juskelis, Tran, & Buchanan, 2008; Cramer & Castro-Olivo, 2016; Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012), as well as stand-alone interventions (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011) were identified. The interventions were mainly delivered by teachers and psychologists who participated in training sessions, prior to program implementation (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017; Ruiz-Aranda et al., 2012). In the analyzed studies, both short-term programs (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011) as well as long-term programs were identified (Castillo-Gualda, Cabello, Herrero, Rodríguez-Carvajal, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2018). The interventions sessions were delivered weekly and the approximate duration of a session was one hour (Castillo-Gualda, Cabello, Herrero, Rodríguez-Carvajal, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2018; Coelho, Marchante, & Sousa, 2015).

6.7. Theoretical framework of the programs

The intervention programs were theoretically driven by several models. From the list of reviewed studies (N=13), 8 studies reported emotional intelligence theories based interventions, among which: *The four branches model of emotional intelligence* (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), *The mixed model of emotional intelligence* (Bar-On & Parker, 2000) and *Goleman's emotional intelligence theory* (1996). Furthermore, several programs were based on Socio-emotional learning theories (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg,

2004) or Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2005) guide and other theoretical models (Table 1).

7. Conclusion

The present study presents a systematic analysis of the evaluation studies on interventions targeting to develop the emotional abilities of adolescent students. The study summarizes the effects of the school-based emotional intelligence development programs, reported by the evaluation studies. Furthermore, several key aspects related to program design and implementation (e.g. underlying theoretical models, program aims, and implementation characteristics) were identified.

Regarding the effectiveness of school-based emotional development interventions, the results obtained in this analysis suggest that emotional abilities development/training is related to several positive educational, behavioural and developmental outcomes (see Table 1). Hence, the results obtained in this paper can be interpreted as a plea for the implementation of school-based emotional abilities training. Based on the results obtained here, such programs may have multidimensional positive effects, extended beyond the educational environment, in the everyday life of students.

Furthermore, the analyzed studies aimed to enhance students' overall emotional abilities as a final outcome, as well as to positively impact students' outcomes in different areas of functioning by developing their emotional abilities. Several programs were structured as curriculum-based interventions and the majority of the programs were delivered to students by trained teachers and psychologists. The interventions described in the reviewed studies encompassed formal learning activities, carried out in classrooms, as well as non-formal, complementary activities, such as community-based activities, excursions, mentoring activities, etc. Concerning the theoretical framework of the intervention programs, the results presented above have highlighted several programs based on scientifically sound theoretical models, such as *The four branches model of emotional intelligence* (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), or *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (2005) framework.

The findings of this study may support clarifying some aspects related to the effectiveness and usefulness of school-based emotional intelligence development programs. Through this analysis, features of effective interventions were presented. Taken together, the results of the present analysis may be further used for developing intervention guidelines for improving emotional intelligence abilities and promoting the positive associated outcomes within schools.

Nevertheless, the present analysis was limited by restrictions to full text access studies. Hence, relevant evaluation studies might have been omitted.

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