



Research Article

AN EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH ON PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE FOR STUDENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Social-emotional competence is the set of abilities that help individual interact with others, regulate one's own emotions and behavior, solve problems and communicate effectively. There are many ways to promote social – emotional competence, for example using a specific social emotional learning (SEL) program or doing some helpful activities frequently. This article presents the quasi-experimental findings on promoting social-emotional competence among 27 students in Ho Chi Minh city University of Education based on some suggested activities, including (1) Self-reflection; (2) Practice gratitude; (3) Understanding emotions and (4) Goal setting. These experimental findings confirm the feasibility and effectiveness of these suggested activities in order to promote students' social-emotional competence.

Keywords: promoting social-emotional competence; social-emotional competence; students

1. Introduction

Social-emotional competence can be defined by many approaches. It can be stated as a set of abilities, a set of skills, or divided into social competence and emotional competence. In this study, social - emotional competence is the set of abilities that help individual interact with others, regulate one's own emotions and behavior, solve problems and communicate effectively.

The review of literature pointed out that social-emotional competence plays a vital role in promoting individual well-being (Taylor, 2017). Specifically, social-emotional competence helps to improve social behaviors, reduce behavioral and emotional problems that cause personal distress (Wells, 1997), reduce violence or bullying, increase cooperation and resolve conflict (McCuin, 2012). Moreover, social-emotional competence was found to be the strongest predictor of an individual's well-being (Goodman, 2015). Therefore, in

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addition to basic research on social-emotional competence, in recent years, promoting social-emotional competence is considered as an educational essential measure in developed countries. Promoting social-emotional competence is a continuous process in which learners acquire knowledge and practice skills to be able to respond effectively in different social situations and contexts (Zhou & Ee, 2012). According to CASEL (2013), social emotional learning (SEL) is designed based on five basic groups of competencies, including (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) positive relationships, and (5) responsible decision making.

There are many different ways to develop an individual's social-emotional competence. It can be a specialized social emotional learning (SEL) program or an integrated program. In addition, there are a number of simply designed activities that are encouraged to do every day in order to promote social-emotional competence. This article presents the quasi-experimental findings on promoting social-emotional competence among 27 students in Ho Chi Minh city University of Education based on some suggested activities, including (1) Self-reflection; (2) Practice gratitude; (3) Understanding emotions and (4) Goal setting.

2. Method

A quasi-experimental method (experimental study without control group) was used in this research

2.1. Objective

This quasi-experimental study was conducted in order to examine the benefits of guided activities (including (1) self-reflection; (2) practice gratitude; (3) emotional journaling and (4) goal setting on promoting social – emotional competence for students in HCMC University of Education.

2.2. Scope

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this was just a quasi-experiment which means there was no control group in this study and some potential influencing variables were set as default. In addition, all activities were conducted remotely via emails and Google Form.

2.3. Brief description of the guided activities used in the experiment

The experiment was conducted by requesting the participants to do at least 10 guided activities during the experimental period. A summary of suggested activities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. A summary of suggested activities

Activity	Summary
Self-reflection	Self-reflection activities help people to self-aware and express themselves effectively. These activities allow participants to reflect their own experiences. In this study, 3 types of self-reflection activities had been used: (1) Color cards (Participant would choose a color card corresponding to the existing emotions and explain why); (2) Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction (Participants would think about and write down what made them satisfied and dissatisfied); (3) Pride –

	Progress – Praise (Participants would think about and write down what made them feel proud, success and something good from others)
Practice gratitude	This activity is recommended by the Youth Leadership Initiative supported Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (Youth Leadership Initiative, as cited in Center for Youth Development, 2017). Practice gratitude plays an important role in social-emotional competence. In this activity, the participants are encouraged to express their gratitude to others and pay attention to their feelings when practicing gratitude
Understanding emotions	This activity helps participants self-aware and understand their emotion. The participants are asked to note down their emotions (emotional journaling) by using a suggested theme (What is the situation? Which emotion(s) do you have in this situation? How do you behave? How do these emotions affect yourself?)
Goal setting	This activity was proposed by Project Success (Project Success, as cited in Center for Youth Development, 2017) in order to help participants set goals and make plan to achieve their goals. The participants are asked to think about their own problems (for example academic problems, relationship conflicts,...) and do the following guided steps by using 4 color notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The yellow note: Participants fold the yellow note hamburger-style and title the left panel “Present” and the right panel “Future.” On the left, students write a current challenge (e.g., “I am failing English.”). On the right, they write their goal (e.g., “I want to raise my English grade to a B.”) • The white note: Title this note “Steps to My Goal.” Using checkboxes, the participants need to list at least 3 steps they will have to complete to accomplish the goal • The blue note: Title this note “Obstacles.” Participants need to list 2 or 3 obstacles that might prevent accomplishment of the goal • The pink note: Title this card “People Who Can Help Me,” those who can help with the “how and why” of goal- setting. On this card, participants need to list 3 people who will support their completing of the goal

2.4. Hypothesis

Participating in 4 guided activities would be beneficial in promoting social-emotional competence among students in HCMC University of Education.

2.5. Variables

- Dependent variable: social-emotional competence
- Independent variable: participating in 4 guided activities.

2.6. Participants

Participants were recruited to take part in this study via online opportunity sampling. The participants were informed about this study, signed informed consent and provided some demographic information as well as their email address for further correspondence. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without

any reason. Finally, there were 27 students (18 females and 9 males) who completed at least 10 guided activities and both baseline and endline surveys.

2.7. Procedure

The procedure included 3 phases

- Phase 1: Planning and baseline survey
 - Planning and recruiting students for the research
 - The Social-emotional competence Scale - SECQ (Zhou & Ee, 2012) was used to measure students’ social-emotional competence. The SECQ (Zhou & Ee, 2012) was translated into Vietnamese using a back-translation process. SECQ has 25 items which was designed to measure 5 dimensions of social-emotional competence based on CASEL model: self-awareness (item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5); social awareness (item 6, 7, 8, 9, 10); self-management (item 11, 12, 13, 14, 15); positive relationship (item 16, 17, 18, 19, 20) and responsible decision making (item 21, 22, 23, 24, 25). Each item is assessed by using a 6-point likert from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). In this study, the reliability of SECQ (Cronbach alpha) is 0.884.
- Phase 2: Conducting experiment
 - The experiment was conducted within one month during the social distance due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Vietnam. Due to this extraordinary situation, the experiment was conducted fully remote via emails and Google Form.
 - Once every 2 days, participants received an email for the suggested activities of the day. Participants would choose to do or skip each suggested activity. However, participants had to the activities checklist. If they skipped an activity, they would tick the box “no activity today”. If they did the guided activity, they would write a summary note for this activity. The schedule for suggested activities is mentioned below:

Table 2. Suggested activities schedule

Day	Activity
1	Activity 1: Self-reflection: Colour cards
3	Activity 2: Practice gratitude: Journaling about gratitude
5	Activity 3: Understanding emotions: Journaling about pleasant emotions of a day
7	Activity 4: Goal setting – Setting a goal for 1 year
9	Activity 5: Self-reflection: Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction
11	Activity 6: Practice gratitude: Express gratitude to someone and note down the experience
13	Activity 7: Understanding emotions: Journaling about unpleasant emotions of a day
15	Activity 8: Goal setting – Setting a goal and planning for 1 semester
17	Activity 9: Self-reflection: Pride – Progress – Praise
From the 19th day	From now on, participants can daily choose to do any of the above activities

- Phase 3: Endline survey was conducted by using SECQ to examine the social-emotional competence among participants after completing the experimental activities.

3. Findings

Table 3 presents the findings of this experimental research on promoting social-emotional competence for students in HCMC University of Education.

Table 3. The SECQ results among participants in baseline and endline surveys

	Baseline (M ₁)	Endline (M ₂)	paired t – test
Self-awareness	23.04	24.56	t = -2.240; p = 0.034
Self management	19.00	21.48	t = -3.318; p = 0.003
Social awareness	20.33	21.67	t = -2.142; p = 0.042
Positive relationship	23.30	24.15	t = -1.187; p = 0.246
Responsible decision making	20.96	21.67	t = -0.877; p = 0.388
Social-emotional competence	106.63	113.48	t = -2.404; p = 0.024

A within-group analysis was conducted for the experimental group. It can be seen that there is an increasing trend in the mean score of social-emotional competence as well as in all of its dimensions from the baseline to the endline survey. The paired sample t-test results also confirm the significant increase in social-emotional competence among participants in 3 out of 5 dimensions including self awareness (M₂ = 24.56 compared to M₁ = 23.04; t = -2.240; p = 0.034), self management (M₂ = 21.48 compared to M₁ = 19.00; t = -3.318; p = 0.003) and social awareness (M₂ = 21.67 compared to M₁ = 20.33; t = -2.142; p = 0.042). Moreover, the total score of the SECQ in the endline survey (M₂ = 113.48) is higher than that in the baseline survey (M₁ = 106.63). The results from a paired sample t-test (t = -2.404; p = 0.024) confirm the significant differences between the baseline and endline survey SECQ scores.

Looking into the details, the change in each participant’s scores from baseline and endline survey is represented in the below graph (figure 1).

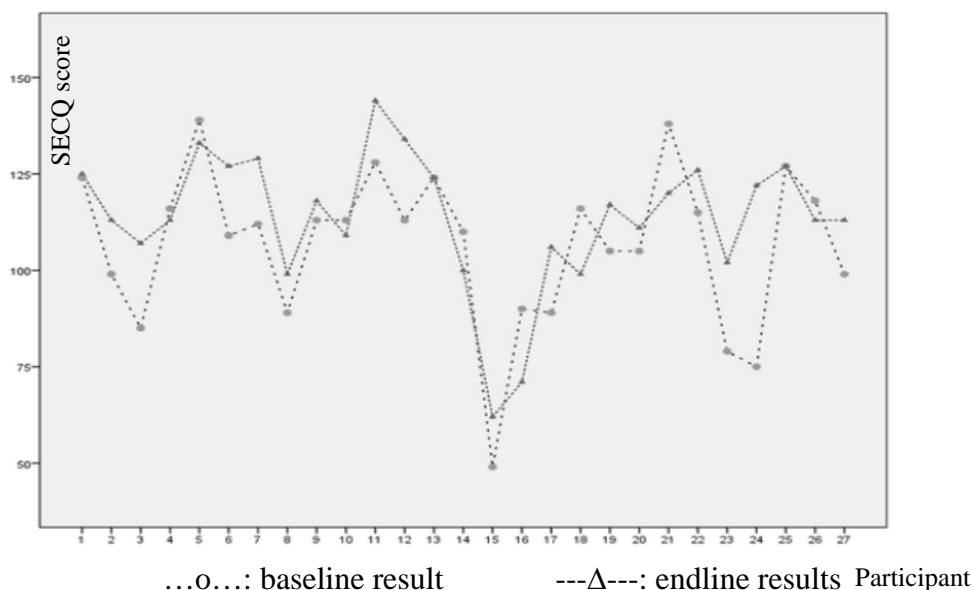


Figure 1. Participants’ SECQ scores before and after the experiment

Looking specifically at the scores of SECQ among participants in the baseline and endline survey, it is easy to realize that there were some changes in the scores, in which, most of the cases recorded an increase in the scores after completing the experiment. However, there are still some students who had a drop in their SECQ scores.

Among participants who had higher scores in the second survey, it is noteworthy that participant number 24 (male, 20 years old) had the greatest growth with 47 points in his endline SECQ scores (baseline: 75; endline: 122). Referred to his provided information and the activity log, some interesting information can be noted down:

- Number of activities had been performed: 20 activities (including all 9 guided activities from day 1 to 17, then, he chose 1-2 activities to do every day in the maintenance phase).
- He shared that his favourite activities were “Self-reflection: Pride – Progress – Praise” and “Practice Gratitude” which were also the most frequent activities he did during the experimentation. He commented that “when doing this activity (self-reflection), I felt that I could deeply listen to myself, understand myself better, it was the same as a kind of journaling and let me know what my day would be, what I could do, what I couldn't do. It's quite simple but makes me feel comfortable”. About the Gratitude activity, he said: “As a man, I always feel shy to express my feelings and gratitude, but today when I called for food delivery and said thank you to the shipper, I saw him smiling and it made me feel happy too. Maybe I will try to express my gratitude more.”
- Sharing his opinion after the experimental phase, he said: “At the beginning, I felt really difficult to do the suggested activities, but later on, everything seemed to be easier. I usually look forward to the next activity. From now on, I am going to continue practicing these activities”.

In contrast, there were still some students who had a decrease in their SECQ scores in the endline survey. Notably, subject number 16 (female, 21 years old) drop out of 19 points compared to the baseline result. Information about the process of performing the activities of this participants had been recorded as follows:

- Number of activities had been performed: 11 (including activity 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; then, the participant chose to perform activity 3, 4, 7, 7, 7 in the maintenance phase).
- She said that her favourite activity was “Understanding emotions: Journaling about pleasant emotions of a day” and claimed that this activity helped her to manage her emotions especially when she had unpleasant emotions. In particular, in her activity diary (day 13), she said that: “Yesterday, there was a Covid-19 infected case next door which made me feel really worried. I didn't dare to tell my family as well as my friends. So when I did this requested activity (activity 7), I felt better when I wrote down my worries.” On the 24th, 25th, and 26th days, she also chose to do activity 7 and also

shared in the activity diary negative emotions: “Today is boring, I can't go anywhere”, or “I don't know when the social distancing will end, I'm bored doing nothing at home.”

- After completing the experiment, she shared her own experience about this phase: “I often forgot to do the activity and filled in the log sheet, by the time I remembered it, it had already passed to another activity. Many times I felt so bored with myself. Later on, I could remember, but I felt lots of pressure as there was a task to complete. But when I finished, I think it would be good, especially during a pandemic period”.

These two cases raise many questions about the implementation of the proposed activities to improve social-emotional competence. These issues may be related to how each participant perceived the guided activity, how frequently was each activity performed, their own experiences, or the differences in their daily life situations. Therefore, more studies are needed to examine the influence of these variables, as well as determine the frequency of proposed activities, and adjust the implementation process of these activities to ensure the best possible outcomes as well as to effectively promote social-emotional competence among youths.

Although there were some individuals whose SECQ scores decreased or remained the same after completing the experimentation, the social-emotional competence among participants generally improved, especially in self-awareness, self management and social awareness.

Thus, the experimental results have proved that the use of suggested activities benefits in promoting social-emotional competence among students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education.

4. Conclusion

Social-emotional competence is defined as the set of abilities including self-awareness, self management, social awareness, positive relationship and responsible decision making, which helps individuals interact with others, regulate one's own emotions and behavior, solve problems, and communicate effectively. Social-emotional competence helps individuals achieve success in their careers as well as in their whole life. Therefore, promoting social emotional is really vital and potentially beneficial.

The quasi-experimental findings on promoting social-emotional competence on 27 students in Ho Chi Minh city University of Education based on some suggested activities, including (1) Self-reflection; (2) Practice gratitude; (3) Understanding emotions and (4) Goal setting confirm the feasibility and effectiveness of these suggested activities in order to promote students' social-emotional competence.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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**THỰC NGHIỆM NÂNG CAO NĂNG LỰC CẢM XÚC – XÃ HỘI CHO SINH VIÊN
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH**

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TÓM TẮT

Năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội là là một tổ hợp năng lực giúp cá nhân ứng xử với chính mình, với người khác, tương tác và hoạt động xã hội một cách hiệu quả. Có nhiều biện pháp khác nhau để phát triển năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội cho cá nhân, đó có thể là chương trình giáo dục năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội (SEL) chuyên biệt hoặc có thể là chương trình tích hợp hoặc cũng có thể là những hoạt động đơn giản được khuyến khích thực hiện thường xuyên. Bài viết này trình bày kết quả nghiên cứu thực nghiệm nâng cao năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội cho 27 sinh viên Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh thông qua các hoạt động: (1) Phản tỉnh, (2) Thực hành lòng biết ơn, (3) Viết nhật kí cảm xúc, và (4) Thiết lập “chiếc bánh mục tiêu”. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã khẳng định tính khả thi và hiệu quả của các hoạt động này đối với việc nâng cao năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội cho sinh viên.

Từ khóa: phát triển năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội; năng lực cảm xúc – xã hội; sinh viên