Emotional intelligence and social skills on self-efficacy in Secondary Education students. Are there gender differences?

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 11 March 2017
Received in revised form 4 July 2017
Accepted 14 July 2017

Keywords:
Self-efficacy
Social skills
Emotional intelligence
Gender
Secondary education

A B S T R A C T

Self-efficacy affects our students’ academic results, which may be related to people’s social skills and emotional intelligence. This study included 1402 (50.71% males) Secondary Education Spanish students (12–17 years), and analysed the relation of self-efficacy with emotional intelligence and social skills. It showed how these constructs were related, and how the self-efficacy perceived by students varied according to their social skills and emotional intelligence. Gender did not influence self-efficacy, social skills and emotional intelligence. These variables showed similar correlation indices in females and males. Self-efficacy was related with social skills and emotional intelligence in Secondary Education students, but this relation was not gender-sensitive. More studies and research are needed to study and describe these variables according to gender from other perspectives. One proposal is to investigate the association between gender identity and self-efficacy and social skills and emotional intelligence to better understand how these constructs participate in adolescent development.

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Beliefs that individuals have about their capacities in a given situation is determined by what Bandura (1997) defined as self-efficacy. These beliefs that people have about their efficacy to be able to control the events, times and situations that affect their lives influence their choice of the activities that they perform, their own achievements and hopes, the level of effort they invest in tasks, their persistence, and their performance of tasks. Self-efficacy is specific and refers to particular domains and given times; i.e., just as some people consider themselves highly efficient in academic tasks, they may also perceive themselves as being poorly efficient in their relations with others, and vice versa. It is also determined by time as people feel efficient when performing a given task in specific circumstances, but highly inefficient in a later contiguous task. Adolescents can feel that they are efficient students in a given course or subject, but inefficient when solving a simple everyday problem. This perception of self-efficacy is the result of several factors: personal experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, the physiological and affective state which, through cognitive, motivational and affective processes, and through process selection, generate different perceptions of self-efficacy in people themselves (Bandura, 1997; Lönnfjord and Hagquist, 2017). All these processes affect people’s functioning as to how they adapt and adjust to surroundings. From another perspective, some authors have considered self-efficacy in a broad sense, and have understood that general self-efficacy as a global construct that refers to individuals’ stable belief about their capacity to suitably handle a wide range of everyday life

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.07.009
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stressors. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (Bässl er & Schwarzer, 1996) evaluates the stable feeling of personal competence to efficaciously handle a wide range of stressful situations.

In any case, the self-efficacy perception is important in academic achievements, vocational choice and social and/or occupational engagement (Carroll et al., 2009; Cikriki & Odaci, 2016; Galicia-Moyeda, Sánchez-Velasco, & Robles-Ojeda, 2013; Zimmerman, 1999), and also in the adaption processes that people follow (Bandura, 1997; Wingelsworth, Qualter, & Humphrey, 2017). With students, it affects their choice of activities, setting objectives, their efforts in and perseverance with a task, and their learning and achievements (Gomes & y Soares, 2013; Jakesová, Gavora, Kalenda, & Vávrová, 2016; Wentzel, Muenks, McNeish, & Russell, 2017). Although students have a very accurate view of their own self-efficacy, some factors exist that influence it: former success and failures, messages of others, success and failures as a group, and even collective self-efficacy (perceiving one’s own capacities and those of others).

Somehow other factors come into play in this self-efficacy perception, such as a person’s social skills or emotional intelligence. As a global approach rather than a non-global one was taken to deal with social skills and emotional functioning in the present research, and not on a specific aspect of adolescents’ lives, work was done as in previous studies (Luszczynska, Gutierrez-Dona, & Schwarzer, 2005); i.e., based on the idea that general self-efficacy, contemplated in a broad sense, facilitates dealing with the three constructs from the same perspective.

1. Psychosocial development in adolescence

In adolescence, rapid and important changes occur. A person becomes biologically, psychologically and socially mature, and is able to live independently. The characteristics of normal psychosocial development in adolescence result from the interaction that links the development achieved in previous life cycle stages, the biological factors of this stage, and the influence of multiple social and cultural determinants.

The adolescent begins two important processes: searching for self-knowledge and achieving autonomy. A good realisation of these processes helps people better cope with stress in this stage and leads to a greater perception of happiness (Salavera, Usán, Pérez, Chato, & Vera, 2017). In these aspects, the perception of self-efficacy, social skills and emotional functioning is fundamental. Adolescence is characterised by the development of emotional intelligence (ability to manage or self-regulate emotions) and social competence (ability to interact effectively with others). The adolescent moves from concrete thinking to abstract thinking, and begins to develop more advanced reasoning skills. This development facilitates progressive autonomy, contributes to young people’s well-being and psychosocial development, and protects them from developing psychological problems in the face of stressful life experiences, where the development of self-efficacy perception, adequate social skills and good emotional functioning are fundamental for adolescents (Gaete, 2015).

2. Social skills and self-efficacy

Social skills are a series of conducts required to interact and relate with others effectively and satisfactorily. They serve to show the capacity to behave in a way that leads to reward, and to avoid behaving in such a way that implies being punished or ignored by others (Kinnaman & Bellack, 2012; Libet & Lewinsohn, 1973). In other words, they are a series of conducts displayed by individuals in an interpersonal context that express their feelings, attitudes, desires, opinions or rights, and appropriately so for the given situation by respecting these conducts in others, which generally solve the immediate problems of the situation and lessen the likelihood of future problems (Caballo, 1993). They are acquired mainly through learning from observation, imitation, testing and information, and are learned conducts as people are not born with a given repertoire of social skills, but incorporate them as they develop, learn and grow. There are two kinds of social skills: basic and complex. The former kind needs to be learned to develop the latter kind. This process begins in childhood, and fundamentally develops in adolescence to confer people communicative and relation tools in adulthood to cover the need to establish positive social relations as a source of satisfaction and personal well-being (Lent et al., 2017).

3. Emotional intelligence and self-efficacy

The very emotional intelligence concept refers to the interaction between emotion and cognition, which allows individuals a functioning that adapts to their surroundings (Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007; Salovey & Grewal, 2005). For Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence consists in: 1) knowing one’s own emotions; 2) handling emotions; 3) motivating oneself; 4) recognising others’ emotions; and 5) establishing relations. The notion of emotional competences lies in the emotional intelligence concept as a crucial factor to explain an individual’s functioning in all areas of life (Mikolajczak, Luminet, & Menil, 2006). Emotional intelligence is an educational, permanent and continuous process that intends to boost the development of emotional competences as an essential element of human development to qualify individuals for life, and to increase personal and social well-being (Bisquerra, 2009). Currently, the debate between two main conceptual perspectives is ongoing: one that centres on basic emotional skills based on people’s adaptive use of employing emotions to solve problems and to efficiently adapt to their surroundings (Mayer & Salovey, 1997); the other is based on the stable traits of behaviour and personality variables (Bar-On, 1997; Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera, 2003; Petrides, 2016). Others consider emotional intelligence to be the skills to identify, assimilate, understand and regulate our emotions and those of others. They are the potential resources that help better confront stressful events (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012).
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