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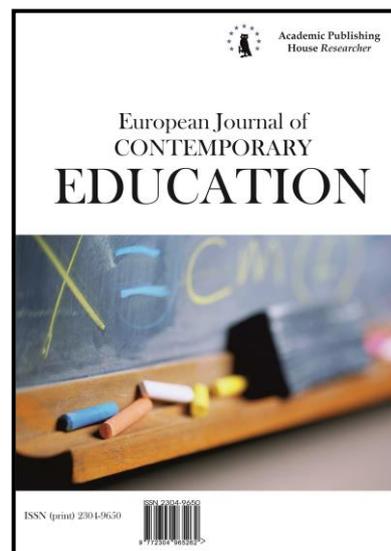
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## Correlations Between Components of Social Emotional Learning of Secondary School Students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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### Abstract

The article discusses the correlation of the social emotional learning (SEL) components perceived by secondary school students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study results show that there is a close correlation among SEL components. Based on the findings, it is implied that the development of SEL competences for secondary school students is an integrated process requiring interactions among different components of the SEL model and forming the model itself via the changes of each component. Moreover, when one component is affected, the influence does not merely happen on that specific component, yet on the entire SEL model as it was a case for the participating secondary school students in this study.

**Keywords:** correlation, secondary school students, social emotional learning, SEL components, Vietnam.

### 1. Introduction

Social emotional competence has been increasingly studied in recent decades for better understanding of the essential social capacities. From one survey in the U.S. on how SEL prepared for transition across the grades of students, the findings emphasised the importance of social cognition and emotional development in the schools. This study reported the results from a meta-analysis in 2011 showing that students received SEL guidance had an average academic grade which is 11 % higher than those who did not receive SEL (DePaoli et al., 2017). Furthermore, thousands of schools in the U.S. and other countries have implemented SEL programs (Humphrey, 2013; Weissberg, Cascarino, 2013), and the Departments of Education at a number of states in the U.S. have issued, or in the process of issuing, standards to develop SEL programs for each grade (Dusenbury et al., 2015). This study also points out the difference among age in SEL competence.

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SEL capacity is correlated with the psychological changes according to the age of the students, especially between 12–13 years and 14–15 years (puberty period with strong psychological changes). As a result, many states and local policy makers have provided financial supports for these SEL programs.

Social emotional competence has played a significant role in personal development of each student. Some researchers also acknowledged the necessity of teacher-student relationships in developing students' commitment to their study and the students' successful academic performance. If teachers create a strong and positive relationship with students in school life, this can enhance and develop the student's social emotional competence (Hamre, Pianta, 2001; Jennings, Greenberg, 2009; Durlak et al., 2011). Safe and disciplined environment which reinforces positive behaviors in the classroom is considered as one of the requirements for good academic performances and the norms of social emotional competence's evaluation (Marzano, 2003). Gender is also an interesting aspect in SEL studies. Kumari et al. (2019)'s study showed that there was a significant difference between boys and girls when studying self-awareness of lower secondary students. At the age of puberty (11–15 years), most girls were aware of themselves better and able to adjust behaviors more appropriate in life and study. Additionally, there are other human-related factors, which can promote the student's academic success via social emotional competence. Students with self-awareness and self-confidence of their learning capacity would give more efforts and more patience when facing with challenges (Durlak et al., 2011; Dweck et al., 2014). Likewise, students who have clear study objectives, disciplinedness, self-motivation, stress management skills and organization skills would have better approaches to their study and thus better performance (Duckworth, Seligman, 2005; Elliot, Dweck, 2005; Durlak et al., 2011). Moreover, students who have problem-solving skills to overcome barriers and are responsible for their studies would have higher academic scores (Durlak, 2015).

Coupled with changes in psychophysiology is the development of cognition, emotion and willing, which makes this period a complex and challenging one for secondary school students, especially in self-awareness and social relationship (Hoa, 2008). If families and schools do not understand and provide these students with appropriate supports, they will face many difficulties and crises during this changing transitional period. Furthermore, this may result in delinquent behaviors and crimes, which would have significant influences on their future (Kendziora, Yoder, 2016). Therefore, the development of secondary school students' social emotional competence needs to be consistently implemented through a combination of educational forces. This study aims to investigate the (a) **social emotional competence of students** in Vietnamese secondary schools and (b) **the correlations between various components of social emotional learning**. Based on the results, suggestions will be offered on how to integrate SEL learning into Vietnamese new general education program for secondary school students.

### **The SEL model**

The SEL model used in this paper includes five core competencies proposed by Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017). The model is considered as one of the basic and characteristic models of SEL studied by many researchers recently (Figure 1).



**Fig. 1.** The SEL model (CASEL, 2017)

The SEL model consists of three aspects and five competencies.

- The three aspects of SEL model include:

+ Social aspect (Social) shows interest in forming and developing positive relationships with others such as friends, teachers, family members, and society. This social part of SEL reflects development with other individuals.

+ Emotional aspect (Emotion) expresses an interest in forming and developing self-awareness, which is particularly relevant to emotions and feelings. This emotional part of SEL reflects the inner development of human life.

+ Learning aspect, which shows the development and adjustment both emotionally and socially and can be taught and learned through instruction, practice, and feedback. Thus, SEL has a connection with the school or other educational environments on different dimensions and specific dimensions.

- The five competencies of the SEL model includes:

+ Self-awareness (Identifying emotions, Accurate self-perception, Recognizing strengths, Self-confidence, Self-efficacy).

+ Self-management (Impulse control, Stress management, Self-discipline, Self-motivation, Goal-setting, Organizational skills)

+ Social awareness (Perspective-taking, Empathy, Appreciating diversity, Respect for others)

+ Relationship skills (Communication, Social engagement, Relationship-building, Teamwork)

+ Responsible decision-making (Identifying problems, Analysing situations, Problems solving, Evaluating, Reflecting, Ethical responsibility) (Binh, 2013).

In all of CASEL's program reviews from preschool through high school, and across all the many programs they have reviewed, they have observed that evidence-based SEL programs used one or more of the following four approaches to promoting social and emotional competence across the five core competency cluster (Dusenbury et al., 2015). CASEL has identified four general approaches to SEL instruction in the classroom:

- *Free-standing lessons that provide step-by-step instructions to teach students' SEL competencies* (e.g., lessons that help students identify and effectively label their feelings, lessons on goal setting, communication, and decision making).

- *General teaching practices that create conditions in the classroom and school designed to support SEL.* These include classroom routines and teaching practices such as cooperative learning that help students build positive relationships and forms of inquiry that create student-to student dialogue to help students reflect and develop greater self and social awareness.

- *Integration of SEL skill instruction, general teaching practices, or both, as part of a broader academic curriculum.* For example, integrating SEL lessons with language arts, social studies, or science and math.

• *Establishment of school-wide organizational structures and policies, as well as leadership, to support SEL systemically.*

In this paper, we propose a strategic approach to SEL for Vietnam's secondary school students based on the correlation between the five components of SEL model.

**Methods and sample selection**

This paper reports part of a large project aiming at designing educational contents, especially life skills education through experience-based activities and integrated teaching methods to develop life skill capacities for students meeting the new educational requirements of the general education.

This study applies a quantitative approach to investigate the social emotional competence of students in Vietnamese secondary schools and the correlations between five components of the SEL model using two questionnaires. The first questionnaire included: (a) introduction of the study's objectives and instructions to answer the survey; (b) participant information covering name of school, grade, gender, ethnic, age, conduct record, and academic scores; and (c) the content of the survey. The content focuses on five aspects: self-awareness with 23 questions; awareness of other people with 17 questions; self-management with 10 questions; relationship with 17 questions; responsible decision-making with 13 questions. The questionnaire adapted 3-point Likert scale proposed by Jacob and Michael (1971). The second questionnaire has open-ended items and problem solving exercises in order to understand participating students' capacities in solving written problems related to each SEL component.

The questionnaires were distributed to secondary school students from sixth grade to ninth grade from February to June, 2018. The study was conducted in four secondary schools in Vietnam. These schools are in different districts in Ho Chi Minh City. They are not gifted schools.

Data collected from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS 20.0 for Pearson Correlation which could find the positive or negative correlation between the five SEL components. Distance value was calculated: Distance value = (Maximum – Minimum) / n = (3-1)/3 = 0.67. The levels' significance was coded as following: from 1 to 1.67= under average; from 1.68 to 2.33= average, and from 2.34 to 3= above average.

Table 1 illustrates participants of the study and their demographics

**Table 1.** Participants of the study

	Items	N	%
Grade	6 (12 years old)	121	23.80
	7 (13 years old)	70	13.80
	8 (14 years old)	61	12.00
	9 (15 years old)	257	50.50
Gender	Male	194	38.10
	Female	315	61.90
School	A (district 1, Ho Chi Minh city)	107	21.00
	B (district 5, Ho Chi Minh city)	281	55.20
	C (district 4, Ho Chi Minh city)	121	13.80
Academic year-end scores (over 10)	Excellent (above 8.0 points)	161	31.60
	Good (from 6.5 to 7.9 points)	180	35.40
	Fair (from 5.0 to 6.4 points)	144	28.30
	Poor (under 4.9 points)	24	4.70
Conduct record	Very Good (good morality, good study, not violating school rules)	468	91.90
	Good (minor violations in the rules but promptly repaired)	34	6.70
	Fair (violated some errors in the school rules and slowly repaired)	6	1.20
	Poor (seriously violating school rules)	1	0.20
	Total	509 participants	

**2. Results**

**The social emotional competence of secondary school students'**

The results of students' social emotional competence are presented in [Table 2](#):

**Table 2.** The social emotional competence of secondary school students

SEL components	Mean
Self-awareness	<b>2.40</b>
Social-awareness	<b>2.20</b>
Self-management	<b>2.25</b>
Relationship skills	<b>2.29</b>
Responsible decision-making	<b>2.35</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>2.30</b>

The mean of the entire SEL model is 2.3 – an average level. Students had their competence of self-awareness the highest and social-awareness the lowest. This result somehow reflects the psychological characteristics relating to cognitive capability of the secondary school age (Tien et al., 2016). According to Foster et al. (2005), the SEL model has been introduced into the secondary education programs in the United States, and 59 % of schools have successfully applied the model to improve social-emotional competence for students. In addition, according to a pilot study at elementary, secondary and high schools in Illinois, USA, the competence of Self-awareness and Self-management which was self-evaluated by students, was the most markedly improved competency group when SEL model was deployed to the educational programs (Durlak, 2015).

The competences of social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making by participating students are average and above average (responsible decision-making). This is similar to what Antognazza and Kapler (2017) found about secondary school students' capacity to identify emotions of themselves and others. In elementary school, children have the ability to understand the feelings of people around them, as well as observing pictures of other people's emotional expressions because from the first years of life, children learn the world around them with emotion. More exposure, as well as preschool and primary education programs focus on emotional education for children, so, when going to secondary school, these capabilities continue to be developed in a positive direction (Antognazza, Kapler, 2017). Regarding the capability to make responsible decisions, at the secondary school level, they think better, they see the problem in many different ways and think more about life, so the decision-making process ensured the quality of responsibility (Tien et al., 2016). In addition, divergence found in competence of self-management (2.25) and relationship skills (2.29) also give us important data. At secondary school, due to the change in mainstream activities, they look for relationships with quality rather than quantity (Son, 2011). They are more interested in each other's characteristics, personalities, interests, and attitudes in a group of friends, thereby they want to build good and sustainable relationships and associations (Ngo, 2012). On self-management competence, Ngo (2012) believed that the development of self-awareness varies by age, and secondary school age are better realized themselves because of the development of puberty as well as the development of awareness about personality traits and emotional life.

**The influence of Gender and Age on students' SEL competence**

The difference in gender and age of the participants when we studied the SEL competence of secondary school students was presented in [Table 3](#):

**Table 3.** The Difference in Gender and Age

Sources	Mean	p
Gender	Boy	0.000
	Girl	
Age	12 years old	0.542
	13 years old	
	14 years old	
	15 years old	

In gender indicator,  $p = 0.000$  showed that there was a significant difference between boy and girl in SEL competence. Female students' SEL competence seemed to be higher than that of male students with the disparity of 0.11.

In age indicator,  $p = 0.542$  showed that there had not a significant difference among the ages or the grade students were in. This mean the SEL competence of Vietnamese secondary school students had no difference according to the age development.

#### The correlation among five SEL components

The correlation between various SEL components by secondary school students in this study were analyzed based on one to one analysis and the entire SEL model (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Correlation coefficient between different SEL components

Correlation coefficient	Correlation coefficient									
	Self-awareness		Social awareness		Self-management		Relationship		Responsible decision making	
	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p	r	p
Self-awareness			.647*	.000	.184*	.000	.531**	.000	.290*	.000
Social awareness	.647*	.000			.436*	.000	.594*	.000	.357*	.000
Self-management	.184*	.000	.436*	.000			.531**	.000	.527*	.000
Relationships	.531**	.000	.594*	.000	.531**	.000			.592*	.000
Responsible decision making	.290*	.000	.357*	.000	.527*	.000	.592*	.000		

\*\* .  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed).

#### Associations between Self-awareness with other components of SEL

With significant level  $p = 0.000$ , self-awareness had a positive correlation with social awareness, self-management, relationship, and responsible decision-making. Therefore, it is suggested that the higher self-awareness the students have, the higher social awareness, self-management, relationship skill and responsible decision-making they will have. This also aligns with the results from problem solving exercises. One example of this is that when being asked, "When doing something wrong, or make mistakes," some students answered, "they know that but cannot specify the feelings" while others knew their feelings, naming some feelings such as "afraid, embarrassed, sad, ashamed". This indicates a quite complicated process and different capabilities in self-awareness of secondary school students, which is useful for organizing the educational activities to develop students' self-awareness competence.

#### Association between social awareness with other components of SEL

With significant level  $p = 0.000$ , it is found that social awareness had a positive correlation with others. It means, the higher level of self-awareness, the higher level of self-management, the better relationship, and the more effective responsible decisions making process.

Data from solving-problem exercises found that social awareness had a connection with social relationship. For the question, "Do you know what your teachers' feelings are when you chat with friends about unrelated topics during class hours?" Some students said, "I didn't know," or "I didn't know well," and other students responded, "I knew that they were sad, angry, and unpleasant." There was a wide disparity among students answering the question showing that understanding other people's feelings to be behave well was not easy to them. The findings perhaps may indicate students' limited competence in social awareness and lack of concerns about other people. This could possibly be a major reason of students' indifference, lack of concerns about other people or even emotionless behaviors (Loan, 2013).

Therefore, when organizing educational activities to develop social awareness for students, it is necessary for educators and teachers to take into accounts the correlation between social

awareness and the other SEL components. Besides, analysis of emotions in different situations, progress, and reactions is also required to develop students' communication and interaction competence.

#### **Associations between self-management with other SEL components**

With secondary school students, self-management capacity is very important and, therefore, is required to be developed. Person correlation test between self-management and other components of SEL indicates a strong correlation between self-management and the other SEL components with significant level  $p = 0.000$ . The more students can control themselves, the more they can be aware of themselves and of other people, the better they manage their social relationships, and the more effectively in making responsible decisions.

Findings from problem-solving exercises also had the same results. With the question, *"Recently, M often called your nickname for teasing... You were very angry. Today, M called that nickname again, laughed at you, and teased you. What would you do?"* Some students showed their self-management capacities, but some other students replied, *"Don't know what to do."* In particular, some students could not control themselves answering that, *"Beat my friend."* This shows that self-management capacity of students in secondary school was still limited. Without concerns and high attention given to educate these students and to equip them with life skills, they may have a tendency of bullying their friends, one of the negative situations existed in Vietnam these days (Son, 2018).

#### **Associations between management of relationship skills with other components**

With significant level  $p = 0.000$  the test demonstrates a strong association between the relationship skills with the other SEL components.

With the situations given in the problem-solving exercises: *"N just transferred to your class. She talked very little and was usually very shy. What would you do with her?"* Several students knew how to develop relationships with her, some students did not know how to communicate with her, some students *"don't care"* about N, *"ignore,"* and even some students did not know how to develop the relationship with this student and also hurted her by saying bad things or cyber bullying at the school. This was of great concern as peer relationship was one of the main relationships of students in this age groups. Students cannot effectively develop with these problems existed.

#### **Association between responsible decision-making with other components in SEL model**

The results show a positive correlation between responsible decision-making with self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship, with  $p = 0.000$ .

This was proved from question *"Once you went around the part for a walk, you eat the biscuit but you could not find the trash bin to throw away the plastic cover of the biscuit. What will you do?"*, some students have irresponsible decision as they did not know what to do with the biscuit cover. Besides, there also were students who have responsible and good-manner behaviors. From this point, secondary school students already noticed the responsibility in their decisions, though the capacities were quite different within the same age groups.

#### **The meaningful difference in level of the five SEL components**

The study also found that secondary school students had different levels in the five SEL components. Mean scores of self-awareness in different perspectives range from 1.77 to 2.86; social awareness's mean scores ranged from 1.61 to 2.81; self-management's mean scores ranged from 1.7 to 2.8; relationship skills' mean scores varied between 1.86 and 2.8; responsible decision-making's mean scores were between 1.67 and 2.78, all mean scores of the five SEL components spread evenly across all 3 levels, from level "under average" to level "above average." This reflects that students were varied in their perspectives of self-awareness competence. They have well understanding of other people in some perspectives or characteristics but may not quite understand their other perspectives. They can handle and manage some relationships or situations, and also some that are unmanageable for the students. They can control their feelings, emotions and behaviors in some cases or on the opposite. They cannot also make the right decision in time but also feel hard to decide in some situations. It based on their SEL competence.

This result allows us to draw a conclusion: the SEL competence of secondary school students in Vietnam has a clear differentiation. Therefore, the establishment of an SEL education model, as

well as the development of the new educational program, must comply with differentiation teaching. We recommend differentiating students into 3 groups that correspond to 3 levels of SEL competence (under average, average and above average level) and develop appropriate programs for each group to stimulate and facilitate the development of the students' capabilities.

### **3. Discussion**

The study results indicate that secondary school students self-evaluated their SEL competence as average on a 3-likert scale and strong and positive correlations between different components of SEL. This implies that SEL competence in secondary school students can be adjusted and developed as a whole or individually.

In alignment with other previous studies, strong and positive correlations between different components of SEL were also found in this study. Previous studies have found that there is a positive correlation between self-awareness and health and emotion (Daunic et al., 2013), expectancy (Durlak et al., 2011), life satisfaction (Jones et al., 2015), anti-social behaviors, and school absenteeism (Brackett et al., 2004). It is suggested that teaching methods for the development of self-awareness from the other countries could be learnt to be applied into the Vietnamese education program.

Results from previous studies also showed a positive correlation between social awareness with establishing relationships with other individual in society (Bahman, Maffini, 2008; Theobald et al., 2015; Davidson, 2011), with high notice and true concerns about people's opinions and view points (Roffey, 2011). Some researchers found the correlations between social capacities with high notice and true concerns about others' opinions, point of views and also the correlation with students' academic score (Bahman, Maffini, 2008; Davidson, 2011; Denham et al., 2012). If we tried searching in newspapers in February 2015, there were 433 papers about: violence, robbery, murder, etc. in different places around the country, relating to the indifference and lack of responsibility, etc. of the residents; information with comments were 135 posts; and the words "indifference/emotionless" were mentioned in 41 posts. On average, there were 15 papers every day talking about the emotionless behaviors between people and the related discussions happening every day in different newspapers. Furthermore, there was a writing about Emotionless behaviors of a grade 9 student in Hanoi city's secondary school. This writing has left deep impressions on readers and has been mentioned in different social media national and international posts. This is also a warning alarm of the risks of dismissing moral and social standards as well as the huge concerns of young people nowadays. Moreover, some professional and experts' comments on this issue deserve high attention: emotionless behaviors have a significant impact on many people. As more and more people do not want to prevent bad behaviors happening in society, these behaviors have been increasing widely (Loan, 2013). Thus, the international and Vietnamese authors have similarities in the impact of social awareness competence on human psychological development. Based on this assertion, it is possible to propose case-based exercises or experience stories related to social awareness to enhance this competence in the new general education program.

Moreover, the results concluded that the students' self-management competence were not stable and different situations had significant effects on this competence. Peterson's research team has found that self-management and the student/teacher matching intervention led to increases in targeted appropriate social skills and decreases in off-task behavior for students in multiple general education setting (Peterson et al., 2006). Thereby, the competence of Vietnamese students' self-management is less than international students. This is an issue needed to be considered in the new education program to improve this competence, contributing to helping Vietnamese students have better self-management.

Some studies showed the positive correlation between relationship skills and emotional health (Hattie, 2009), negative correlation with anti-social behaviors (Garner, 2010) and mental health such as anxiety and depression (Daunic et al., 2013). In general, there is a spread of relationship skills competence among individuals. This also has differences between countries because of the communication capability is influenced by cultural and social factors. This is a matter of concern when integrating this component into the educational program.

There were the positive correlations between responsible decision-making and healthy emotions and behaviors of students (Forgas, 2000; Humphrey et al., 2007) and children mental health (Jones et al., 2015). Students with high competence of responsible decision-making can

have better self-awareness, better social awareness, better self-management and more effective management of social relationships. This result shows that the responsible decision-making competence of Vietnamese students has an internal disparity with each other. When compared to the international students, Vietnamese students are inferior. Therefore, the design of practical exercises or educational activities that help improve and enhance students' responsible decision-making competence is an essential requirement in the development of the SEL model applied in the new educational program.

However, our study still has certain limitations. The evaluation of the student's SEL competence is only based on the analysis of the questionnaire results, with no comparison with the student's self-evaluation. Therefore, the long-term observation as well as the addition of interview results or case studies can support this study to be deployed on a larger scale and get more accurate. In addition, gender and age differences have been clarified in this study. But we have not explained the gender difference, nor the difference in the age among the participants because of the lack of arguments for interviews and assessments from the educational forces (teachers, educators and educational manager). If possible, studies of differences in SEL competence between boys and girls by age (among secondary school age; making comparisons between primary and secondary school students) would be promising research directions later.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The associations between different SEL components in secondary school students were analyzed in one-to-one associations and as a whole within the SEL model.

The results show that Vietnamese secondary school students' SEL competence is at average level. This data is very important for educational managers as well as teachers to pay attention to developing more appropriate educational content as well as methods to properly assess students' capability. Thereby conducting the teaching methods suit for the students' capability to develop their SEL competence.

There were a strong and positive correlations between SEL components. This is an important basis for teaching students to differentiate SEL abilities. At the same time, based on this result, we propose designing and developing an education program for SEL competency training that is consistent with the levels assigned to secondary school students.

It is suggested that SEL competence of secondary school students requires the interactions among five SEL components. New educational programs in Vietnam are required to be designed in a way to improve current level of students' SEL competence, considering a strong correlation among the five components advanced educational activities in each component in SEL to enhance students' social emotional competence. Moreover, when affecting on one specific component, it would not merely has influence on that specific component, yet the whole SEL capacity of secondary school students in general. This is a significant point in development SEL capacity of Vietnamese secondary school students, opening new directions for implementing SEL education. In the current conditions of systematic and synchronized education programs, policy makers and other stakeholders may consider the adaptation of SEL education into the available life skill training program. Development specific component or the whole SEL model has potential and feasible applications in the future education program.

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