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Teacher's Social and Emotional Competences: A Study Among Student Teachers and Students in Education Science in Slovenia

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Abstract: In contemporary school systems, the concept of a teacher is defined as a socially and emotionally intelligent, pedagogically, and psychologically competent school leader. This would mean that not only the teacher's subject knowledge is sufficient, but also good knowledge of general pedagogical-psychological skills, knowledge, and management of the didactic approach, etc. Social and emotional skills/intelligence (SEI) restore the value of teachers as creators of learning and connect education to the larger social world in which SEI plays the most important role. This paper highlights the importance of social and Emotional Intelligence (SEI) in teacher education, examining the current state of research and the most important role of SEI in students' personal, social, and academic achievement, as well as teacher effectiveness and personal growth. By presenting the scientific evidence of SEI in teaching and teacher education, this study assesses the SEI level of student teachers at the University of Primorska, Faculty of Education, Slovenia. SEI is examined, through its main components: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness and Social Skills. In conclusion, this paper aims to show the need to develop SEI in future teacher education in Slovenia.

Keywords: *Social and emotional skills, intelligence, teacher education, teacher training.*

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Introduction

The Professional Profile of Today's Teacher

A new, rapidly changing knowledge society also requires some new "roles" of teachers, which include the following requirements: Skills for working with diverse students (different abilities, special needs, multicultural differences); Ability to reflect, research and evaluate own work; Openness to change; Mentoring; Teamwork; Integration of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) into teaching; Greater mobility, innovation; Teacher as facilitator of learning; Concern for personal and professional development; Teacher as part of an evolving (learning) organization, etc. (Day, 1999; EURYDICE, 2002; Goodson, 2003; Persson, 2006). As the social and emotional needs that teachers must meet satisfactorily increase, so do the social and ethical responsibilities of teachers. Basic competencies, among which we can count emotional intelligence, according to DeSeCo in most European countries are the following (Rychen & Salganick, 2001): (i) they contribute to valuable outcomes for society and individuals; (ii) they help individuals to meet important demands in a variety of contexts; (iii) they are important for all people, regardless of gender, social status, and family environment. The development of all these competencies is beneficial for all students, children, and teachers (Palomera et al., 2008).

Emotional intelligence in the school context refers to the emotional side of teaching as the ability to recognize, define, and manage students' emotions and deal with intrapersonal relationships in the classroom (Polak et al., 2015). We emphasize that the formation of social and emotional competencies is necessary for children, students, and teachers to successfully adapt, learn, and grow personally, academically, and intellectually.

Also, in the Slovenian education system it is assumed that we have many good, but still (few) excellent pedagogical professionals. The current educational system aims to strengthen the general education of children and students and

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help them acquire crucial skills to participate responsibly, independently and with a critical attitude towards society. In this context, we focus not only on their professional, technical and educational skills, but also on the personality traits, values and beliefs that are of great importance in this profession. We assume that the socio-emotional skills of the teacher are fundamentally linked to the cognitive skills. In this context, we particularly emphasize rich life experiences, positive moral qualities, rich pedagogical practice, life-related social-emotional maturity, and balance.

Research in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as today, clearly shows that the following capabilities are most common for successful teachers: (i) maturity and experience; (ii) intellectual superiority and exceptional grasp; (iii) satisfaction with their work; (iv) achievement of various high levels of achievement (performance); (v) a positive attitude towards students and work; (vi) neat, systematic, organized; (vii) creativity and imagination; (viii) sense of humor; (ix) lifelong learning; (x) creating a stimulating learning environment and encouraging students in their work (Burden, 2003; Renzulli, 1980; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Most of them are related to social and emotional intelligence.

Consequently, concern for continuous professional or technical development is a professional duty of teachers in more than twenty European countries and regions, not only in the subject area but also in social-emotional competences. Psychologists have classified the characteristics of emotional intelligence into five basic areas: Self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, empathy and resourcefulness in social contacts (Goleman, 2005; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Simmons & Simmons, 2000). All these traits manifest in two types of relationships that a person develops throughout life: Relationships with self and relationships with others. Emotional intelligence is based on the principle that intelligent resourcefulness has a greater impact than emotion, rather than cold and objective data processing, in a variety of life situations.

Considering this, teaching is still considered one of the most stressful professions, as teachers face daily social relationships, communication, and moments in which they must regulate their own emotions as well as those of students, parents, and colleagues (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Therefore, the ability to recognize, regulate, and most importantly understand emotions and social interactions is so important. To help students, become emotionally competent, future teachers must first and foremost be trained Emotional Intelligence to regulate their own emotions and those of others. Emotional Intelligence is extremely important for teacher educators as it is essential for teachers and learners (Spilt et al., 2011).

Literature Review

The term Emotional Intelligence became better known through Goleman (1997, 2005), who described emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize one's own feelings and emotions, the ability to motivate and control feelings in oneself and in one's relationships with others. Goleman (1997) emphasized that high IQ is not a guarantee of success. He has shown that emotional intelligence is the most important individual factor in personal adjustment and performance in interpersonal relationships in various areas of our work (Goleman, 1997, 2005; Simmons & Simmons, 2000) and suggested that emotional intelligence (EI) is an essential component of success in life (Goleman, 1997, 2005). It includes skills that are distinct from, but complementary to, the cognitive skills of academic intelligence measurable via Intelligence Quotient (IQ).

Goleman (2005) also developed and authored a model of the basic domains of emotional intelligence. The model includes five basic emotional and social skills: (1) Being self-aware or knowing one's emotions: being aware of one's current feelings and abilities and taking them into account when making decisions, a realistic assessment of one's abilities, and strong self-confidence. Accordingly, we need to recognize and name our emotions so that we can perceive that we are in an emotional state, and thus be more tolerant of our decisions and actions; (2) Self-control or management of one's emotions: Mastery of one's emotions so that they do not interfere with our work but we can deal with them, a quick recovery after emotional stress; (3) Self-promotion or self-motivation: using the whole tendency to pursue one's goals, incentives and progress and overcome obstacles and disappointments due to frustration; (4) Empathy or recognizing the feelings of others: recognizing the feelings of others, the ability to understand their attitudes, maintain relationships and relate to people despite their differences. Understanding the feelings of others enables us to motivate, lead effectively, and work in successful teams. Emotional intelligence gives us the ability to remain calm and composed in difficult moments and to act honestly and courageously; (5) Social competence: management of emotions in relationships with others and accurate recognition of social circumstances and relationships, constant interaction, ability to use all listed skills in persuading and leading, negotiating, and defusing conflicts for better cooperation and teamwork.

On the other hand, Bar-On's conceptual model of emotional-social intelligence (ESI) provides theoretical foundations for a psychometric model and an approach to measurement and is a mixed model of EI consisting of specific emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators divided into different domains that interact with each other: (1) intrapersonal (including emotional awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-esteem, and self-actualization); (2) interpersonal (including empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships); (3) stress management (including stress tolerance and impulse control); and (4) general mood (including happiness and optimism).

Bar-On defines emotional-social intelligence as an understanding of self and others, the central role being the ability to observe and distinguish between others, especially between their moods, character, motivation, and intentions (Bar-On,

1997). In his theory, he emphasizes the importance of emotional expression and sees the result of emotionally intelligent behavior as effective and successful adaptation. The author defines emotional intelligence as an understanding of one's own emotions and the emotions of others, a good interpersonal relationship, and the ability to adapt to different situations and stresses in the environment (Bar-On, 1997, 2006; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003).

Nevertheless, emotional intelligence should be broadly defined as social intelligence, as it also includes internal, individually known emotions that are important for their social growth and adaptation (Pečjak & Avsec, 2003). Besides the EI, social intelligence (SI) is the most important intelligence we can cultivate and develop - by changing, developing and adding to ourselves.

Social intelligence is the ability to read nonverbal cues or make accurate social inferences and the ability to achieve relevant goals in specific social situations (Albrecht, 2006; Brown & Anthony, 1990; Ford & Tisak, 1983). Zirkel (2000) believes that social intelligence is closely related to personality and individual behavior. People with social intelligence are fully aware of themselves and understand their environment, have high abilities to communicate, understand (verbal and nonverbal) and listen to others. They love to socialize, have many friends, and easily make new acquaintances. An important characteristic of these people is also that they are particularly good at negotiating, discussing, solving conflict situations and problems, and drawing conclusions. The development of social intelligence depends on the number and intensity of interpersonal interactions we have in daily life. Silvera et al. (2001) presented three components of social intelligence, namely social information processing, social skills, and social awareness (Silvera et al., 2001).

Socially intelligent people are outgoing, they are noticeable, warm, positive and are remembered after the first encounter. Social skills are based on a system of attitudes, interests, values, and social norms that enable individuals to understand themselves and their environment and, consequently, to respond to developments with the strategy that corresponds to the goals they are pursuing at a given time. Hargie et al. (1994) refer to social skills as abilities that facilitate interaction and communication with others. Social skills include several elements that are closely related: the element of perception - the relatively accurate perception of other people and situations, the element of cognition - the ability to judge other people appropriately, the element of behavior - the behavior of what to do and how to do it in each situation, the element of emotion - appropriate emotional expression and response.

Socially and Emotionally Intelligent Teachers

Socially and emotionally competent teachers are critical to strong and supportive teacher-student relationships (Baker et al., 2008; Jennings, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition, a socially and emotionally intelligent teacher is fundamental to healthy student development and is positively related to students' academic achievement, success, social functioning, academic engagement, and motivation to learn (Baker et al., 2008). SEI of teachers is necessary for personal and teaching-learning processes in the classroom and for students' social and emotional development (Durlak & Weisberg, 2005, as cited in Palomera et al., 2008; Sutton & Whealthey, 2003).

Teachers need to develop competencies that enable them to interact in socially competent and emotionally intelligent ways. They are not only expected to be academic professionals, but also professionals in their own emotional and social skills. Teachers' social and emotional skills are extremely important as they help them avoid burnout and stressful situations, increase their well-being and self-esteem, and ultimately create a positive learning and working environment. In addition, teachers' and students' positive emotions promote learning and the achievement of important intrapersonal connections. Teachers who are socially intelligent organize the classroom by building supportive and encouraging relationships with their students, developing instruction based on students' strengths and abilities, and creating and applying behavioral guidelines that promote intrinsic motivation (Marzano, 2003; Marzano et al., 2003). Accordingly, Albrecht (2006) considers social intelligence as a prerequisite for teachers, and the educational system and teachers should respect the rules and behaviors associated with high social intelligence.

Social-emotional competence provides the necessary skills and dispositions that help teachers build supportive relationships with their students, effectively manage their classrooms, and successfully implement social and emotional learning. Goleman (2005) divided emotional skills (for teachers) into two groups: (i) Personal skills - how well we manage ourselves: Awareness of ourselves; knowledge of our inner experience, emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence. Self-control: mastery of inner experience, education, self-control, reliability, conscientiousness, adaptability, and open-mindedness to new things. Motivation: emotional tendencies that lead or help him to achieve a goal, commitment, initiative, optimism and (ii) Social skills - how well we handle interpersonal relationships which are: Empathy - awareness of others' emotions, needs and concerns, especially understanding of others, ability to develop others, willingness, and commitment to diversity. Social skills - the ability to elicit the desired response from others, influence, manage conflict, provide leadership, promote change, reach out to others, cooperate, and work as part of a team.

The most important and fundamental skills that teachers and future teachers need to acquire are: (1) Knowing self and others (recognizing feelings, taking responsibility, identifying strengths); (2) Making responsible decisions (managing emotions, understanding relationships, setting goals and plans, solving problems creatively); (3) Caring for others (showing empathy, respecting others, valuing diversity); (4) Knowing how to act (communicating effectively, building

relationships, negotiating fairly, refusing provocation, seeking help, acting ethically) (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Empathy is one of the most important elements in teacher education if empathic teachers have high moral standards, successfully communicate with their students both emotionally and mentally, and encourage them to build similar relationships with others (Jennings, 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The development of SEI is determined by genetics and several other factors, which include education and the learning of various behaviors that have a strong influence on SEI (Matthews et al., 2004). In this regard, the relationship between student (children) and teacher is the most important experience for a child in the development of personal EI, expression and emotional control. We emphasize that school is the most important place and environment for learning emotional-social skills and competencies. Not only the school, but also the faculties where students are forced to focus on learning SEI skills in an integrative, supportive, and systematic way. They are also forced to use self-regulation and self-assessment as well as appropriate teaching strategies or techniques to influence children's development SEI. Teachers and prospective teachers (students) can stimulate SEI through the development of self-awareness, self-control, empathy, personal motivation, and interpersonal skills with various activities that need to be included in the curriculum and in the study program of faculties of education.

Methodology

Research Goal

In this study, a quantitative empirical research approach was used to find out whether and how developed the most important SEI skills are in future teachers, university students of the Faculty of Education in Slovenia (hereafter UP PEF students). The following hypotheses are:

H1: UP PEF students have significant difficulties in emotion management.

H2: There are no statistically significant differences in the ability to express and name emotions between students of Primary classroom teaching (PCT) and Pre-school teaching (PST).

H3: There are no statistically significant differences between PCT and PST students in their ability to identify and understand emotions.

H4: There are differences according to the level of study (undergraduate and postgraduate) in terms of problems in understanding emotions and communication.

H5: More than 80% of students agree with measuring social intelligence of prospective students at enrollment.

Sample and Data Collection

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska with the 152 students participated in the study, of which 92.1% were women and 7.9% were men. The lowest age was 19 years, the highest was 60 years, and the average age of the respondents was 26 years. 61.2% of the respondents were studying at undergraduate level (Education science (ES) - 19.1%, Primary classroom teaching (PCT) - 22.4% and Pre-school teaching (PST) - 19.7%), while at postgraduate level: Inclusive pedagogy - 21.1%, Early childhood education - 1.3%, Primary classroom teaching (postgraduate) - 7.9%, Social pedagogy - 5.9% and 3rd level - 2.6%).

The data were collected using a questionnaire based on the basic elements of SEI (Taksić, 1998). We used the questionnaire Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire (ESCQ) to measure the following key concepts using appropriately defined sets of statements:

(i) Ability to recognize and understand emotions (16 statements, 5-point ordinal scale; 1 - not valid at all / 2 - not valid / 3 - sometimes valid / 4 - mostly valid / 5 - always valid); the common variable has a range of values between 1 and 5, a higher score indicates a better ability to recognize and understand emotions); Cronbach's alpha = 0.932

(ii) Ability to express and name emotions (13 statements, 5-point ordinal scale; 1 - not at all true / 2 - not true / 3 - sometimes true / 4 - mostly true / 5 - always true); the common variable has a stock of values between 1 and 5, a higher score means a better ability to express and name emotions); Cronbach's alpha = 0.910

(iii) Ability to deal with emotions (16 statements, 5-point ordinal scale; 1 - not at all valid / 2 - not valid / 3 - sometimes valid / 4 - mostly valid / 5 - always valid); the common variable has a stock of scores between 1 and 5, a higher score means a better ability to deal with emotions); Cronbach's alpha = 0.864. In several studies using versions of the ESCQ, the Cronbach's alphas α for the Perception and Understanding scale ranged from .81 to .90; for the Expressing and Naming Emotions scale, α ranged from .78 to .88; and for the Managing Emotions and Regulate Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire scales, the internal consistency measured by α ranged from .67 and .78. There were moderate positive correlations among the subscales (.35-.51), allowing for the formation of a linear composite measure of overall emotional competence with an internal consistency between $\alpha = .88$ and $\alpha = .92$ (Taksić et al., 2009).

In addition to the ESCQ questionnaire, we also had a series of statements in the questionnaire that respondents used to self-assess competence in emotional intelligence (12 statements, 3-point rating scale) and three content questions about attitudes toward social-emotional intelligence during the study. No / I don't know, which we used to assess how familiar respondents were with the content of emotional and social competence, how well prepared they themselves were emotionally and socially for social and professional challenges, and whether they felt it was necessary for the pedagogy of future students to assess levels of emotional and social intelligence.

Analyzing of Data

Results were presented in terms of frequencies and percentages and, in the case of ordinal variables, with basic descriptive statistics. Since the key variables deviated from the normal distribution, which we tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, we used only nonparametric tests (Wilcoxon test, Mann-Whitney U test, chi-square test) in the bivariate analysis. After testing and achieving high reliability of the questionnaire (Cronbach $\alpha > 0.8$), the total variables appearing in the analysis were compiled by calculating the average of all statements belonging to the common set. Cohen's d was used to check the effect size for the significant results.

Results

The results of the ESCQ questionnaire show a fairly high level of emotional intelligence of pedagogical students, as the average scores of all three groups are relatively high and just below a score of 4 on the 5-point rating scale, which means that the assessed characteristics apply to students. All three composite variables deviate from the normal distribution, for all three an asymmetry to the left is observed, which means that the values are located at the right pole of the scale, around a score of 4. The highest mean score is recorded for the ability to recognize and understand emotions, followed by the ability to deal with emotions ($M = 3.79$) and then the ability to express and name emotions ($M = 3.72$).

Table 1: Comparison of assessments of areas of emotional intelligence

	F1 Ability to recognize and understand emotions (n=152)	F2 Ability to express and name emotions (n=152)	F3 Ability to manage emotions (n=152)
Mean	3.83	3.72	3.79
Standard deviation	0.58	0.62	0.48
Wilcoxon test statistics (p value)	Pair 1 F1-F2 -2.029 (0.042) *	Pair 2 F2-F3 -1.365 (0.172)	Pair 3 F1-F3 -1.277 (0.202)

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2: Wilcoxon test of equality of ranks between areas of emotional intelligence

	Ability to express and name emotions - Ability to recognize and understand emotions	Ability to manage emotions - Ability to recognize and understand emotions	Ability to manage emotions - Ability to express and name emotions
test statistics	-2.029	-1.277	-1.365
p value	0.042	0.202	0.172

The table shows the results of the Wilcoxon test, which was used instead of the paired t-test because of the deviation of the distribution of the variables from the normal distribution. The P-value is the significance value that tells us whether the differences between pairs of variables are statistically significant (when $p < 0.05$).

The lowest mean score was obtained for the ability to express and name emotions ($M = 3.72$); pairwise comparisons with the Wilcoxon test showed that this score was statistically significantly different from the score for the ability to recognize and understand emotions ($p = 0.042$). Cohen's d is 0.18, indicating that the effect size is small.

There were no statistically significant differences between the other pairs of statements ($p > 0.05$), which means that we measured the same high level of ability to recognize and understand emotions ($M = 3.83$) and ability to manage emotions in the surveyed students. The ability to manage emotions is otherwise rated as good (score of 4 on a 5-point scale) and is not statistically significantly different from the other two areas of emotional intelligence assessed.

With respect to the ability to recognize and understand grades, we found a slightly lower grade point average for Primary classroom teaching (PCT) ($M = 3.81$) than for Pre-school teaching (PST) ($M = 3.89$), but the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 0.632$).

In the second hypothesis, we compared ratings of the ability to express and name emotions between Primary classroom teaching (PCT) and Pre-school teaching (PST) as a function of subject area. Primary students ($M = 3.72$) were found to have a slightly higher mean score than pre-school students ($M = 3.62$), but the difference was not statistically significant

($p = 0.666 > 0.05$). We also found no statistically significant differences in emotion management skills by subject, with both mean scores slightly below a score of 4 on a 5-point scale ($p = 0.377$).

Table 3: Comparison of assessments of areas of emotional intelligence according to the field of study

	Primary classroom teaching (PCT) (Undergraduate)			Pre-school teaching (PST)			Mann Whitney U test
	n	average	std. dev.	n	average	std. Dev.	Test statistics (p value)
Ability to recognize and understand emotions	34	3.81	0.5	30	3.89	0.58	473.500 (0.623)
Ability to express and name emotions	34	3.72	0.62	30	3.62	0.74	478.000 (0.666)
Ability to manage emotions	34	3.87	0.35	30	3.73	0.62	444.500 (0.377)

The table shows the basic descriptive statistics of the measured variables according to the direction of the study, including the results of the Mann Whitney U test, which was used instead of the independent samples t test due to the deviation of the variables from the normal distribution.

A comparison of the same variables by level of study revealed no statistically significant differences in scores on the domains of emotional intelligence ($p > 0.05$). Both undergraduate and graduate students achieved consistent and high mean scores in all domains, slightly below a score of 4 on a 5-point scale. The results indicate that for both undergraduate and graduate students, all three domains of emotional intelligence are well developed and there are no significant differences between them.

Table 4: Comparison of assessments of areas of emotional intelligence according to the level of study

	Undergraduate Study			Postgraduate Study			Mann Whitney U test
	n	average	Test statistics (p value)	n	average	std. deviation	Test statistics (p value)
Ability to recognize and understand emotions	93	3.88	0.49	59	3.75	0.69	2404.500 (0.199)
Ability to express and name emotions	93	3.7	0.63	59	3.75	0.62	2667.000 (0.772)
Ability to manage emotions	93	3.78	0.45	59	3.8	0.53	2662.500 (0.759)

The table shows the basic descriptive statistics of the measured variables by study level, including the results of the Mann Whitney U test, which was used instead of the independent-samples t-test because of the variables' deviation from the normal distribution. Most of the respondents (88.7%) believe that the level of emotional and social intelligence should be assessed in future students of education majors. Chi-square test of variable distribution confirms that the distribution of responses is statistically significantly different from random distribution ($p < 0.001$).

Table 5: Do you think it would be necessary to assess the level of emotional and social intelligence in students enrolling in the Faculty of Education?

	n	%	Chi square statistic	p value
Yes	126	88.7	196.113	0.000
No	8	5.6		
Don't know	8	5.6		
Total	142	100		

Most respondents (88.7 %) are of the opinion that it would be necessary to introduce basic content from the field of emotional and social intelligence in study programs / subjects at the undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Table 6: Self-assessment of competence in different areas of emotional intelligence

	Unqualified/in competent		Not Qualified, not Unqualified		Qualified		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
a) perceiving and recognizing feelings in oneself and others	1	0.7%	56	38.9%	87	60.4%	144	100%
b) empathy	2	1.4%	17	11.8%	125	86.8%	144	100%
c) effective communication	4	2.8%	54	37.5%	86	59.7%	144	100%
d) ability to motivate	4	2.8%	55	38.2%	85	59.0%	144	100%
e) decision making	11	7.6%	69	47.9%	64	44.4%	144	100%
f) flexibility	1	0.7%	28	19.4%	115	79.9%	144	100%
g) controlling one's mood	13	9.0%	63	43.8%	68	47.2%	144	100%
h) perseverance	3	2.1%	55	38.2%	86	59.7%	144	100%
i) obedience	7	4.9%	26	18.1%	111	77.1%	144	100%
j) positive attitude towards others	3	2.1%	23	16.0%	118	81.9%	144	100%
k) appropriate conflict resolution	4	2.8%	60	41.7%	80	55.6%	144	100%
l) influencing others	12	8.3%	74	51.4%	58	40.3%	144	100%
m) appropriate communication	3	2.1%	51	35.4%	90	62.5%	144	100%
The total average percentages		3.6%		33.7%		62.7%		

On the scale, assess your competence in the following areas, where 1 means incompetent; 2 neither qualified - nor untrained; 3 - trained.

The self-assessments of competence in the various areas of emotional intelligence were also surprisingly positive, with the lowest proportion of respondents selecting a score of 1 - incompetent, followed by a score of 2 - neither qualified nor incompetent, and the highest proportion of respondents selecting a score of 3 - qualified. Thus, most of the respondents rated that they are skilled in the areas of empathy (86.8%), positive attitude towards others (81.9%), flexibility (79.9%), listening (77.1%) and appropriate communication (62.5%) and perception and recognition of feelings in themselves and others (60.4%). On the other hand, the ability to control one's own mood (9.0%), influence others (8.3%), and make decisions (7.6%) are rated the lowest; these are the areas where the percentage of respondents who consider themselves incompetent in this regard is the highest.

Table 7: Attitudes towards social-emotional intelligence during studies

	Yes		No		Don't know		Total	
	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%	f	f%
During your studies, were you acquainted with the contents related to your emotional and social competencies (ability to recognize, express and manage emotions, empathy, communication, etc.)?	93	64.6%	37	25.7%	14	9.7%	144	100%
Do you feel that you are emotionally and socially intelligent enough for the challenges of the future in your personal and professional field?	83	58.5%	28	19.7%	31	21.8%	142	100%
Do you think it would be necessary to assess the level of emotional and social intelligence in students enrolling in the Faculty of Education?	126	88.7%	8	5.6%	8	5.6%	142	100%

In the last set of questions, we examined attitudes toward socioemotional intelligence during their studies. Almost two thirds of the respondents (64.6%) estimate that during their studies they were familiar with the contents related to their emotional and social skills; the answer "no" was chosen by 25.7% of the respondents and the answer "I don't know" by 19.7%. On the other hand, only 58.5% of the respondents estimated that they were emotionally and socially intelligent enough to face the challenges of the future in their personal and professional lives. Given the relatively good scores in the ESCQ questionnaire and the high scores on competencies in various areas of emotional intelligence, this could be due to a somewhat lower level of confidence in mastering this area, as indicated by the fact that respondents chose the answer "no" (19.7%) or "I don't know" (21.8%). Most respondents, 88.7%, agreed with the last question about the need to assess the level of emotional and social intelligence in future students.

Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) states that UP PEF students have significant difficulty in emotion management. The results show that there were no statistically significant differences between the other pairs of statements, which means that we measured the same high level of ability to recognize and understand emotions and ability to manage emotions among

the students surveyed. Misra and Castillo (2004), in comparing American and international students at two universities in the United States, found that American students reported more self-imposed academic stress and more significant behavioral responses to stressors than international students. These findings highlight cultural differences in how students cope with stress. However, in a study of students from Botswana, Monteiro et al. (2014) found that emotion regulation plays an unconscious role in the perception of and response to stressful situations, while Pekrun et al. (2017) add that most emotions experienced in the academic environment fall into emotion categories other than anxiety. We thus conclude that the field of study and the level of study have no influence on the perception and regulation of one's emotions, as it is an individual perception. Thus, it is a matter of the development of an individual's personality, education and experience, as well as other biological determinants, which, however, have no significant relationship with the individual's studies (Matthews et al., 2004). In this regard, it is worth noting the important fact that teachers often process their emotional experiences in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching, which highlights the important role of emotion management in the context of educational work (Sutton, 2004).

For the second hypothesis (H2), we were interested in whether there were statistically significant differences between preschool and classroom students in the expression of different dimensions of emotional intelligence. We demonstrated that there are no statistically significant differences in the ability to express and name emotions between primary and preschool students. In Slovenia, Santl (2020) notes similar findings and emphasizes the importance of understanding students' emotions, which play an important role in social relationships and academic learning, goal orientation, cognitive resources, self-regulation, motivation, and self-esteem (Götz et al., 2003; Pekrun et al., 2017; Valiente et al., 2012). Therefore, we find that there is no difference in the expression of the SEI dimensions between groups of students with different professional profiles, and we can say that both are sufficiently able to manage emotions in their studies and professional activities.

In the third hypothesis, we compared the rating of the ability to recognize and understand emotions between primary school students and preschool students, according to the field of study. Classroom students ($M = 3.81$) than pre-school students ($M = 3.89$), but the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.623$; $p > 0.05$). We confirm hypothesis 3, as we have demonstrated that there are no statistically significant differences in the ability to recognize and understand emotions, students of Primary classroom teaching (PCT) and Pre-school teaching (PST). In the fourth hypothesis (Table 3 and Table 4), we compared all three domains of emotional intelligence as a function of grade level. A comparison of the means showed equal scores, and the Man Whitney U test confirmed no statistically significant difference between the groups ($p > 0.05$). The results suggest that all three domains of emotional intelligence are well developed in both undergraduate and graduate students and there is no significant difference between them. Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed. Thus, subject and level of study do not have a statistically significant effect on the recognition and understanding of emotional states. The findings are particularly important for future educators because schools need to provide children, and especially their teachers, with intellectual and practical tools to bring to their classrooms and communities. When schools implement quality emotional and social learning programs, children's academic achievement increases, the incidence of problem behavior decreases, and relationships with children improve (Elias, 2006; Elias & Arnold, 2006). The most important factors that lead to school dissatisfaction, failure, and dropout are social-emotional (Elias, 2006).

Most of the respondents (88.7%) are of the opinion that the level of emotional and social intelligence should be assessed in future students of pedagogical fields (Table 5). Chi-square test of variable distribution confirms that the distribution of responses is statistically significantly different from random distribution ($p < 0.01$). We confirm our hypothesis (H5). Interestingly, students indicate empathy as an area they are good at. Here, we must refer to some authors (McKenna et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009) who find in their research that there are no statistically significant differences between empathy and pre-educated respondents. In doing so, Sheehan et al. (2013) point out that empathy is an innate trait that cannot be learned during school years. However, the diction contradicts authors who have studied empathy in relation to different teaching strategies (e.g., Cunico et al., 2012; Eymard et al., 2010). Teacher professional learning itself is a complex process that requires strong emotional and cognitive engagement, both individually and collectively. Research indicates the need to develop SEI for future teachers and education workers, emphasizing the importance of continuing education on the content of SEI. Indeed, emotional intelligence is a key factor for the success of the educational system (Astituti et al., 2019; D'Amico et al., 2020; Gonzales-Valero et al., 2019; Rathee, 2018).

Conclusion

We investigated the knowledge and management of emotions and emotional intelligence in students of different fields of study at the Faculty of Education, University of Primorska (Slovenia). To test the hypotheses, we used the ESCQ questionnaire (Emotional Intelligence, Abilities and Competence Questionnaire), although other questionnaires are available in Slovenia that are not as economical and reliable (such as the Emotional Competence Inventory; The Multifactor Emotional Intelligence).

We found that the first set of questions, which also confirms the first hypothesis, is dominated by statements with which students confirm the recognition and understanding of emotions. In this way, we find that students from different disciplines and levels of study understand the concept of emotional intelligence. Also, in the second group, where we

determined the expression and naming of emotions, there were no statistically significant differences between students in terms of level and field of study.

Otherwise, we must interpret the results with caution of students having a high probability of giving a socially desirable answer. The research has confirmed that students are able to recognize and understand their own emotions and the emotions of others, to name them appropriately and to deal with them. There was also identified a need for additional training in emotional self-management and the development of emotional-social intelligence. All components structuring the questionnaire reflect an emotionally mature and stable person, which is also expected from future pedagogical professionals.

Recently, research efforts have focused more on exploring the effects of emotions on higher level cognitive processes (Blanchette & Richards, 2010). Briefly, emotions interact with the four types of essential processes of our minds that are fundamental to learning-attention, shaping of concepts and knowledge structures, allocation of cognitive resources to specific information, and reflective (metacognitive) processes that guide our strategic thinking information processing. Training education students and teachers in the emotional demands of teaching and ways to improve emotional management skills is particularly important (Brown et al., 2014; Kerr & Brown, 2016), as the latter can also prevent burnout, which is a risk in the teaching profession (D'Amico et al., 2020; Sutton, 2004).

The teacher's level of emotional intelligence contributes significantly to teacher-student communication and relationship. EI facilitates stress management, resolves conflict, and contributes to the creation of a positive learning environment and student success. Teaching requires a balanced and skilled professional coping with diverse roles and tasks. Based on the above research findings, we assume that the development of emotional intelligence must be encouraged and developed in the early years of everyone's life. It is important that teachers in schools and parents at home create a stimulating learning environment in which students can express themselves with all that they are and provide them with certain emotional skills that will help them in various challenges in their lives.

Recommendations

For further educational, practical, and scientific research, we suggest that such studies could be conducted on a larger randomized sample, allowing generalization of the results to the population. In addition, qualitative research approach could provide in-depth examination. The interviews and observation of teachers' classroom performance, emotions would provide more realistic insight into the SEI. In addition, after conducting interviews with teachers, SEI workshops could be conducted for students in the classroom to determine whether there is a relationship between SEI of teachers and students (e.g., whether high teacher emotional intelligence has an impact on SEI students). Initial teacher education could contribute significantly to the well-developed teacher emotional intelligence that is an important factor in well-developed emotional skills in children.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations. Despite the fact that the ESCQ questionnaire is widely used, reliable and valid in Slovenia, respondents may overestimate or underestimate their experience and understanding of their own abilities and emotions on the basis of self-assessment of certain statements and give socially desirable answers ("social desirability bias") because they are expected to be more emotionally and socially intelligent or to comply with professional, moral and social norms in view of their future professional activity. An important feature of the questionnaire used, which should not be ignored, is that it measures certain variables in general rather than in a specific context, which may lead to a discrepancy in understanding the individual's performance in certain situations.

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