

## The role of emotional intelligence in adolescent development in Bulgaria

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**Abstract:** The relevance of the presented topic is confirmed by the fact that in recent decades, emotional and social skills have been placed at the center of both research interest and public dialogue. The specific research was conducted in this direction. Subjects of the study are 120 students from high schools in the country. The purpose is to establish the levels of Emotional Intelligence / EI / of adolescents. The EI test, adapted by Prof. Stoyanova for Bulgaria by Schutte and co-authors (The 33-item emotional intelligence scale, Schutte N.S., 1990), was applied. The obtained results provoke interest and discussion about recommendations regarding the emotional education and development of Bulgarian adolescents.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, adolescence, education

### Introduction

Modern society is quite sensitive to the problem of successful social adaptation of the individual and, in parallel, to his emotional - personal development.

The requirements for each person are to be responsible for their own decisions and actions, to show initiative, to successfully achieve their goals without violating the rights of the others. All this is combined with analyzing our own and the others' emotional experiences.

Apart from the evidence of the interrelations between individual abilities to understand and manage emotional experiences and subjective well-being in the modern person's life, there are reasons to consider emotional intelligence as a potential tool for choosing a suitable career and coping with the difficulties, accompanying this process (Mitevska M., Tsvetkova P., 2020). Emotional-social development of adolescents is a key factor and a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in various aspects involved in diverse systems of social relations. Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood - quite a slanted bridge to cross. Then significant changes occur, ending with the process of human physical maturation. Life activity becomes more complicated, expanding the range of social roles and interests, gaining greater independence and responsibility (Hristova, 2015). Adolescents' ability to communicate in a healthy and free way or to understand how others feel are some of the key factors in promoting emotional intelligence from an early age. Just the specific research was conducted in this direction and the problem is of particular importance, since the development of adolescents in Bulgaria needs to include quality training programs, complied with the individual differences of adolescents and appropriate management of self-initiative and interpersonal relations.

### Emotional Intelligence Concepts

The appearance of the emotional intelligence / EI / idea is defined by critics as a transitory phenomenon. But some authors defend the EI thesis and deny the one-sided emphasis on the role of intellect for the individual's success.

According to Aristotle, the rare ability "to get angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, in the right way", is emotional intelligence (according to Goleman, 2011). Already in his early works, Darwin points out the relationship between emotional self-expression, survival, and adaptation.

Initially, the EI concept was associated with the social intellect. In 1920, E. L. Thorndike used the term "social intelligence", in order to describe the ability to understand others and to "act wisely in human relations" (Thorndike, 1920). In 1940, David Wechsler described the influence of non-cognitive factors on intelligent behavior. He found that individuals with identical cognitive intelligence quotients differ in their ability to effectively deal with the challenges of the environment, depending on the information type they operate with - non-verbal and verbal. According to Wechsler, non-cognitive factors - affective and motivational abilities, determine a specific type of behavior - "intellectual behavior" (Wechsler, 1940). In 1983, in his book "Frames of Mind: Theory of Multiple Intelligences", H. Gardner formulated the idea of multiple intelligence, according to which traditional conceptions of intelligence fail to provide a satisfactory explanation of human cognitive abilities and the results of human actions. The multiple intelligence includes both interpersonal intelligence (the ability to understand the expectations, motivations, and desires of the others) and intrapersonal intelligence (the ability to understand and evaluate your own feelings and motivations), which are components of the emotional intelligence (Gardner, 1983).

In his doctoral thesis, "A study of emotion: Developing emotional intelligence; self integration; relating to fear, pain and desire" (1983/1986) first Wayne Payne justified the need to study the phenomenon of EI, examining it as a cognitive ability type. The Israeli psychologist - Reuven Bar-On uses the term "emotional-social intelligence", suggesting that the intellect consists of many personal and interpersonal abilities, skills and habits that together determine human behavior (Bar-On, 2006). Bar-On introduced the EQ designation (emotional quotient) – an emotionality quotient by analogy with IQ – an intellect quotient (Bar-On, 2004).

The article of Peter Salovey and John Mayer – "Emotional Intelligence: Imagination, Cognition and Personality" is considered the first systematic development of the emotional intelligence issue. Influenced by Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, Salovey and Mayer suggested that EI is a component of a configuration of social, practical, and personal intelligence and is unique combination of intelligence and emotion (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

The term EI was popularized only after the publication of Daniel Goleman's bestseller – "Emotional intelligence: why it can matter more than IQ". In 1995, Nancy Gibbs published an article that first drew readers' attention to Goleman's book and started the great interest in emotional intelligence.

## Essence

The emotional intelligence is the ability to manage one's own behavior and respond adequately in complicated social situations. Emotions often determine the decisions we make, in order to achieve desired results at a high level of self-understanding, self-assessment, and self-control.

The different models that represent and describe EI are based on various conceptions of the concept's content. In general, the researchers follow three types of models:

- 1) Emotional intelligence as an ability type (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) – it studies the relations between the three main mental processes - emotional, cognitive and volitional (motivational);
- 2) Emotional intelligence model as a personality trait (Furnham & Petrides, 1999). This model examines EI as a relatively stable personality trait over time, which affects almost all spheres of life - family, work, interpersonal relations, and mental health.
- 3) Mixed models, proposed by Reuven Bar-On and Goleman – they include in this concept not only emotion and intelligence, but also motivation, non-verbal dispositions, personality traits and social skills.

The main EI idea includes understanding, controlling, and managing one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. Goleman offers a version that he considers more convenient for understanding the importance of emotional intelligence in life and work. The version includes five fundamental emotional and social competencies, presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Emotional intelligence components

	Definitions	Criteria
<b>Self-awareness</b>	Ability to recognize and understand one's own mood, feelings, and motives, as well as their impact on the others	Self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, sense of humor
<b>Self-control</b>	Ability to control or overcome destructive impulses and moods; no primary decisions are made; the thought precedes the action;	Worthiness and integrativeness; willingness for change;
<b>Motivation</b>	Desire and passion for work; willingness to achieve goals persistently; persistence;	Strong desire for achievement, optimism, and commitment
<b>Empathy</b>	Ability to understand the emotional state of the others; ability to treat people according to their emotional decisions;	Willingness for helpfulness and goodwill; cross cultural sensitivity.
<b>Social skills</b>	Good emotional management in relations; relaxed interaction; tendency to seek harmony and balance;	Persuasiveness and experience; change management effectiveness;

### Essence, features and properties of emotions

Our inner world is revealed through emotions. They have cognitive, behavioral and physical manifestations. These are mental processes and states, related to human instincts, needs and motives. Emotions are responsible for experiencing pleasure and displeasure and are both opposite axes of emotional life. They cause feelings that influence thoughts, which in turn are responsible for the behavior. The manner decisions are made is very important for creative and analytical thinking. Emotion is energy and motion. The positive emotions are fueled by the hidden desire for pleasure and unity. The negative ones, in turn, are fueled by our fear of the unknown, by the fear of the actions of others. Emotions are vital necessity. Person gets to know the world around him, his possibilities and those of others through them. That is why special attention is paid to the emotional and social development of the child. It is a prerequisite for stimulating the whole mental activity when acquiring new knowledge, forming new skills and making contacts with adults and children. Despite the fact that emotional intelligence has recently become part of public research, the experience in this field is not new. Thousands of studies have been conducted on the development of EC skills in children (and not only), but unfortunately, few of these findings have been applied in practice.

### Purpose, object and method of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the levels of emotional intelligence among adolescents in Bulgaria. The EI test of Schutte and co-authors, adapted by Prof. Stoyanova for Bulgaria (The 33-item emotional intelligence scale, Schutte N.S., 1990), which consists of 33 items, was applied. The tests were applied to 120 teenagers (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) in schools in Plovdiv, Sofia, Zlatitsa, Stamboliyski, Stara Zagora and Haskovo. It is assumed that the levels of emotional intelligence are high, according to the four factors: sharing emotions and empathy; motivation to overcome difficulties and optimism; recognition of non-verbal expression of emotions in other people and recognition of own emotions and self-control.

### Results and conclusions

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for individual factors and for raw score in total**

Scale	Total number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Lower quartile	Upper quartile	Average score	Standard deviation	Asymmetry
Factor 1	120	12	30	24	21	27	23,55	4,199	-0,753
Factor 2	120	18	40	34	28	36	31,64	5,234	-0,581
Factor 3	120	10	24	16	15	18,75	16,95	2,566	0,245
Factor 4	120	8	20	14	13	17	14,68	2,802	-0,626
Raw score under Schutte	120	74	115	113	112,25	113,5	122,82	16,036	-0,626

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics by factors and in general, under Schutte's questionnaire. The mean value for the entire questionnaire is 122.82 and the standard deviation is 16.036. The asymmetry is negative and not very large, which means that the raw score is shifted slightly to the right, towards the higher values. The mean value for factor 1 (sharing emotions and empathy) is 23.55, and the standard deviation is 4.2; the asymmetry is negative and not very large, which means that the raw score is slightly shifted to the right, towards the higher values. The mean value of factor 2 (motivation to overcome difficulties and optimism) is 31.64, and the standard deviation is 5.234; the asymmetry is negative and not very large, which means that the raw score is slightly shifted to the right, towards the higher values. The mean value of factor 3 (recognition of non-verbal expression of emotions) is 16.95, and the standard deviation is 2.566; the asymmetry is positive and very small, which means that the raw score is around the mean value. The mean value of factor 4 (recognition of own emotions and self-control) is 14.68, and the standard deviation is 2.8; the asymmetry is negative and small, which means that the raw score is shifted slightly to the right, towards the higher values.

On the grounds of the obtained results, it can be summarized that the highest values were registered for factor 2 / motivation and overcoming difficulties /. It is important for students to achieve high results and demonstrate their achievements. This is one of the means to realize the need for social approval. Another explanation regarding the motivation could be that it is a way to win the friendliness of adults. Emotions make adolescent life more complete. They are constantly looking for activities that make them happy. They share the joy of their peers. They carefully listen and share important events with them and are always ready to help. They estimate when to share their personal problems with others. They are positive about overcoming difficulties and in this regard, they are helped by a proper reassessment of past events. They are generally optimistic and have been found to solve their problems best when, they are positive. Regarding factor 2 / sharing emotions and empathy /, Bulgarian teenagers understand other people's point of view, do not judge and do not make hasty assessments. They do not show indifference to the others and have no difficulties in interpersonal relations. They are self-confident and reveal their feelings. Regarding the self-control, lower levels were found here. It is necessary for Bulgarian children to demonstrate it more often: to postpone the quick reward in favor of a higher goal, to manage stress, to motivate themselves, to set themselves goals, and to work for their achievement.

## Conclusion

Similar to the rational intelligence, EI can be nurtured and developed purposefully. This provides an opportunity for more complete realization of the genetic prerequisites and successful social adaptation and educational level. "Emotional intelligence is equivalent to "human effectiveness" - it is the basis for achieving success in all life spheres through the acquisition of healthy emotional and social skills" (Vermeulin, 2008). Expressing our feelings and emotions by naming them with words, we stimulate the development of EI and the emotional literacy in general. In this way, we fully participate in life not only by reacting, but also by actions and decision-making. A key factor is the construction of positive mindset, which supports the expression of the entire palette of emotional states. Adolescents with high EI are guided by their "inner" voice and recognize their feelings well. On the other hand, individuals with low EI do not think as much about the behavior of the others, about the reasons that led to this behavior and about his emotional motives. They are more self-centered, interested only in themselves, and this makes it difficult for them to integrate into society. The interdependence between emotional and cognitive intelligence is related to success and fulfillment in life. More and more research shows that it is EI that gives greater chances of success. It is a fundamental piece of the puzzle of human identity that reveals the true potential of people as individuals.

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