

UNRAVELING THE ROLE OF SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES BETWEEN FUTURE TIME PERSPECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING ACROSS ADULTHOOD

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Abstract

Social and emotional learning is an integral part of human education and development and is the process through which everyone, children, and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence (CASEL, 2020). Good emotional management, greater motivation, and awareness of oneself and the people around us, impact the quality of life, contribute to satisfaction and participation in the work context. But the challenges and the transition that adults face through their adult life are diverse: ranging from transition to adult identity to playing a constellation of roles from which derive many responsibilities as to the end of the working career.

The main objective of the study is to observe how the different stages of adult life are characterized by social and emotional skills. A second goal is to understand the relationships holding between SE skills, wellbeing experienced, and future time perspective.

A total of 212 participants living in North East of Italy were surveyed for their Socioemotional skills, future time perspective, and wellbeing. According to their age, three groups were identified: emerging, young and middle-aged adults.

The study confirms the specificity of Social and Emotional Competences (SECs) across adult development. Regression-based mediation models were estimated to test the direct and indirect effects between dimensions addressed. The analyses evidenced the mediation role of social and emotional skills in the relationship between future temporal perspective and psychological wellbeing. The model highlights the predictive effect of time perspective on CSEs, which have a predictive effect on psychological wellbeing.

The results highlight the critical role of socioemotional skills for understanding the complex relationship between FTP and subjective wellbeing. Additionally, Social and Emotional Learning must be considered an integral part of adult education and lifelong learning and guide prevention and support actions.

Keywords: *Socio-emotional skills, time perspective, wellbeing, adult development, education.*

1. Introduction

Adults live in a globalized society characterized by high insecurity, challenges, and rapid changes that include digitization and individualization, economic crisis, global competition and reshape their lives in a way that they struggle to predict. Additionally, the challenges and the transitions that adults face through their adult life are diverse: emerging adults face the transition of identity from student to the young worker and the achievement of an economic level that ensures independence; middle adults' life is characterized by challenges concerning the work and family environment. Later, adults play a constellation of roles from which derive many responsibilities as to the end of the working career.

Being able to achieve future goals derived from the different roles can influence the ability to both manage daily challenges and successfully project themselves into the future (Arnett, Robinson, & Lachman, 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). People with stronger future orientation have expectations, aspirations, and plan. Changes in time perspective may lead them to focus more on emotion-regulating or redirect their social interactions toward relatively few close relationships (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 2003). Older adults usually view the future less positively, compared to younger and middle-aged adults and score lower than younger adults in measures related to positive evaluations of the future, demonstrating a more limited future time horizon or perceiving a limited time left in life (Coudin & Lima, 2011; Lang and Carstensen, 2002; Webster and Ma, 2013).

The role of age for the individual experience of wellbeing, in work and organisational life has been also recently underlined (Zacher and Froidevaux, 2021) but maintaining psychological wellbeing across the life span can be challenging,

Social and emotional learning is an integral part of human education and development and is the process through which everyone, children and adults develop the skills, attitudes, and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence (CASEL, 2020). Good emotional management, greater motivation, and awareness of oneself and the people around us, impact the quality of life, contribute to satisfaction and participation, hence of wellbeing in everyday life contexts. Additionally, studies suggest that older adults are aware of the limited time they have remaining, and so to maximize social and emotional gains they prioritize emotional meaning over knowledge acquisition. The maintenance or even growth in psychological wellbeing that occurs with age (Charles & Carstensen, 2008) may reflect their role.

Recent studies have shown that the competence to adequately manage emotional challenges in the professional field is related to greater wellbeing experienced (Dorociak Rupert, & Zahniser 2017; Mayordomo, 2016). Significant relationships have been also evidenced between intraindividual characteristics and future time perspective (Henry, Zacher, & Desmette, 2017). But studies addressing these issues across adulthood are still limited.

2. Objectives

The dimensions of wellbeing of environmental mastery and autonomy increase over the course of adult life (Ryff, & Keyes, 1995) and the social-emotional sphere becomes increasingly important (Carstensen, 2006). It is then worth observe how the different stages of adult life were characterized by social and emotional skills.

A second goal is to understand the relationships holding between SE skills and wellbeing experienced, and components of future time perspective. CSEs are then expected to play a mediating role in the relationship between future temporal perspective and wellbeing experienced.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

A total of 212 participants participated in the study; 68.4% were female and 31.6% were male. Their age ranged from 19 to 60 years. To capture life-course differences three groups were identified: emerging, young and middle-aged. Emerging adults (age range 19-29) involved 104 people (49.1%), adults (from 30 to 45 years) were 64 (30.2%) and middle- adults (from 45 to 60 years) were 44 (20.8%). As for schooling, 6.1% up to 8 years of education, 40.6% have a secondary school diploma (from 9 to 13 years of study) and 53.3% have a three-year or higher education degree (from 13 years of study upwards). Forty-two (21.7%) carried out social and health or psycho-educational professions, 61 (28.8%) were in the technical-organizational field, 48 (22.6%) were students and 61 (28.8%) were involved in other professions. As regards relational life, 80 (37.7%) described themselves as single or unmarried, 125 (59%) mentioned a stable relationship, 7 (3.3%) are widowed or divorced.

3.2. Tools

Several tools were proposed to study participants tapping dimensions under study:

Social-Emotional Competencies (from Davidson et al., 2018). The tool investigates social-emotional skills with 40 items. The tool is characterized by 8 subscales that identify the different CSEs: Self-awareness of one's own strengths, Self-awareness of one's emotions, Management of emotions, Management of goals, Management of work, social awareness, social skills and Decision Making. Participants are asked to express the easiness of their experience for each statement on a 5-point scale where 1= very difficult, 2= quite difficult, 3= neither easy nor difficult, 4= quite easy, 5= very easy.

Psychological Wellbeing Scales (PWBS; Ryff, & Keyes, 1995). The 18-item questionnaire covers six dimensions of eudaimonic wellbeing (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance) with a 4-point scale (1= very much in disagreement, 2= in disagreement, 3 = agree, 4 = very agree).

Future time perspective (Zacher, & Frese, 2009). The tool investigates the orientation to the future according to its 3 dimensions: breadth of the future, the perceived limits and the opportunities that can be seen. It consists of 10 items scale. Participants are asked to express the degree of consensus on 4 points (1= very much in disagreement, 2= in disagreement, 3 = agree, 4 = very agree).

4. Analyses and results

Data analysis was realized using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 27 and *jamovi* version 1.6.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) conducted between the different stages of adult life compared to CSE dimensions showed a main significant effect [Wilks Lambda: 0.842, $F(3,211) = 2.262$, $p < .005$]. Specifically, a significant effect of age comparing groups respectively for Self-awareness [$F(1vs3) = -3.74$, $p < .05$; $F(2vs3) = -3.22$; $p < .05$], and Management [$F(1vs2) = -3.50$; $p < .05$] were found. As regards Self-awareness, older adults showed a significantly higher mean level than the other two age groups, while for Management the group of adults showed a significantly mean level in comparison with the young group (Table 1).

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations (SD) in scores reported in the dimensions addressed and summary of pairwise comparisons. Significant differences are reported in bold italics

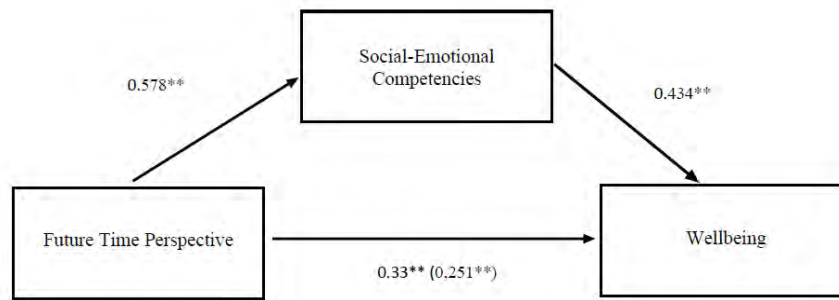
Dimensions	Young adults (1)	Adults (2)	Middle adults (3)	Multiple comparisons		
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	1-2	1-3	2-3
Total SECs	142,21 (14,7)	146,55 (15,2)	147,86 (14,2)	-4,34	-5,65	-1,32
AWARENESS	53,60 (6,0)	54,12 (6,7)	57,34 (5,9)	-,519	-3,74*	-3,22*
MANAGEMENT	69,94 (9,1)	73,44 (8,3)	71,59 (7,7)	-3,50*	-1,65	1,85
Decision making	18,66 (2,5)	18,98(2,5)	18,93 (2,2)	-,32	-,27	,05
Self Awareness of Strengths	14,00 (1,7)	13,98 (1,9)	14,86 (1,8)	,02	-,86*	-,88*
Self Awareness of emotions	20,89 (3,6)	21,48 (3,7)	23,18 (2,8)	-,59	-2,29*	-1,70*
Management of Emotions	12,18 (2,8)	13,25 (2,7)	13,20 (2,2)	-1,07*	-1,02	,05
Management of goals	13,84 (2,9)	14,33 (2,3)	13,89 (1,9)	-,49	-,05	,44
Management of work	21,48 (3,9)	23,01 (3,3)	22,27 (2,8)	-1,53*	-,79	,74
Social Awareness	18,71 (2,5)	18,65 (2,6)	19,29 (2,5)	,06	-,58	-,64
Social Skills	21,73 (3,6)	22,84 (3,3)	22,23 (3,3)	-,40	,22	,62

The results show a significant difference between groups in Self-awareness of one's strengths ($F(1vs2) = -0.86$; $p < .05$, $F(2vs3) = -.88$, $p < .05$), Self-awareness of emotions ($F(1vs3) = -2.29$; $p < .05$; $F(2vs3) = -1.70$, $p < .05$), Emotion Management ($F(1vs2) = -1.07$; $p < .05$), and Management of Work ($F(1vs2) = -1.53$; $p < .05$). For the first two scales the large adults show a significantly higher level of CSE for the first two, while for the second two were the adults of the intermediate age group to present a higher score.

To test the mediation role of SECs, *Path Analyses* were carried out based on regression models to observe the impact of SECs on the relationship between future time perspective and components of wellbeing. Before testing the hypotheses, intercorrelations between the study variables were calculated showing significant relationships between variables under study.

The mediating role of CSEs in the relationship between temporal perspective and perceived global wellbeing was then analyzed (Figure 1). CSEs seem to partially mediate the relationship between future perspective and wellbeing ($\beta = .251$, $p < .001$), although the direct effect between the two indices is greater ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). It is worth to highlight the predictive effect of the future time perspective ($\beta = .578$, $p < .001$) on CSEs, which have a predictive effect on psychological wellbeing ($\beta = .434$, $p < .001$).

Figure 1. Regression model of SECs and the relation with future time perspective and. Indirect effects are reported in parenthesis. Legenda: * $p < .005$, ** $p < .001$.



Consequently, future time perspective plays a role in the wellbeing of the person and this relationship is mediated by the CSE. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Direct and indirect and mediation effects of Social-Emotional Competencies.

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Indirect	Future Time Perspective, SECs, Wellbeing	0.255	0.0436	0.169	0.340	0.251	5.84	<.001
Component	Future Time Perspective, SECs, Wellbeing	1.437	0.1393	1.164	1.710	0.578	10.31	<.001
		0.177	0.0250	0.128	0.226	0.434	7.08	<.001
Direct	Future Time Perspective, SECs, Wellbeing	0.339	0.0622	0.217	0.461	0.334	5.45	<.001
Total	Future Time Perspective, , Wellbeing	0.594	0.0566	0.483	0.705	0.586	10.49	<.001

The model highlights the predictive effect of time perspective on CSEs, which have a predictive effect on psychological wellbeing. Thus, it is worth emphasizing the importance of Socio-Emotional Skills as a coping mechanism.

5. Discussion

The results of the study confirm the specificity of patterns in Social and Emotional Competences across adulthood. Social and Emotional skills vary both in the awareness and in management components. Emerging adults have significantly lower levels in total CSE, Self-Awareness Management, with reference to Awareness of Emotion and Work Management. Some awareness-related SECs seem characterized by a linear increase from emerging to middle adulthood; on the other hand, management related SECs seem sensitive to change in a specific adulthood period. Management of emotions in general and specifically in the work context might be challenged by contextual requests specifically for adults from 30 to 45 years.

As for psychological wellbeing, the results of the research are in line with the literature (Li & Hasson, 2020, Dorociak et al., 2017) showing a significant relationship between future time perspective and wellbeing, SECs and psychological wellbeing.

The analyses highlight a significant mediation role of CSEs between future perspective, wellbeing. Consequently, favoring the development of CSEs adults might experience greater wellbeing in different contexts of life, as suggested by recent research studies (Taylor, 2017).

With the progress of adult development, the relationship component becomes more and more important (Carstensen, 2006). It is then possible that people develop greater competencies in understanding and managing emotions and social aspects because they are more motivated to maintain significant affections, which increase the wellbeing experienced. In particular, mastery of the environment is in relation to the management skills of both work and emotions, emphasizing the importance for adults to cope with the professional and work challenges that arise in everyday life (Arnett, Robinson, & Lachman, 2020).

Results also support the need for integration of a lifespan developmental framework that conceives human development as a continuous, multidimensional, and multidirectional process as well as individual action regulation and adaptation to changing environments and life course perspective which focuses on the interplay between systems and the individual (Zacher and Froidevaux, 2021).

6. Conclusions

The results highlight the critical role of socioemotional skills for understanding the complex relationship between FTP and subjective wellbeing. In the face of the many daily challenges, the adult who has the highest skills to project himself into the future and to manage emotions and goals, will be able to experience greater psychological wellbeing. Although the study underlines the need for further extended studies on the issues addressed here, social and emotional learning should be considered an integral part of adult education and lifelong learning. Adult education and prevention actions should focus on self-orientation, orientation towards others, and orientation towards development goals or adapting to change to strengthen them and promote overall wellbeing and in particular environmental mastery.

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