Enhancing Emotional Competencies among Adolescent Students in Tanzanian Secondary Schools: A Focus on Social-Emotional Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study intends to improve the emotional competences of Tanzanian secondary school adolescents by examining and identifying successful social-emotional learning practices. Questionnaires and focus group talks were completed by 244 teenagers, ages 13 to 17. Students and teachers reported through surveys and interviews, respectively, the benefits of social emotional skills and social emotion regulation techniques. Perception of emotions had positive effect on students' interest in learning (β=.144, t(4, 239)= 2.141, p=.033). A student's participation, teamwork, communication, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control were statistically shown to enhance social and emotional competences (the model summary's impact size was 54%). This research investigates how students manage their learning and develops their emotional competences by looking at their social-emotional skills. This study offers methods for fostering emotional competences as well as the impact of social emotional abilities on students' ability to cope with learning. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should therefore provide curricula and a framework for the efficient control of teenage students' social and emotional behaviour.

Keywords: Social emotional learning; Emotional strategies; Emotional competency; coping; learning

1. Introduction

The 21st century learner will acquire knowledge and skills beyond just mastering the foundational courses taught in school. According to Vivekanandan and Pierre-Louis (2020), learners in the twenty-first century must be proficient in four essential skills: learning skills, literacy skills, life skills, and soft skills. As a result, educators are urged to provide students with opportunities to develop all of these abilities, including soft skills like emotional intelligence (EIS). Furthermore, social emotions among teenage kids are nothing new in the global community. Childhood experiences give rise to these feelings, which continue into adulthood (Musoga, 2017; Rowe and Fitness, 2018; Spencer, Walsh, Liang, Mousseau, and Lund, 2018). Adolescents have acknowledged its complexity (Larson and Brown, 2007; Rubin and Hewstone, 1998) because of the multiple levels of determinism. Rowe and Fitness (2018) supplemented that adolescent students' demonstrated anger, happiness, and sadness when at school for about 95%, 29%, and 81%, respectively. These social emotions that emerge among learners if not properly managed may result in difficult coping among adolescents during schooling, hence impeding the learning processes (Sospeter, Shavega, and Mnyanyi, 2021).

The Universal Social Emotional Learning (SEL) framework has been adapted to promote social emotional skills among individuals (Panayiotou et al., 2019). This can be achieved through the implementation of the SEL programme in schools for adolescent students. The implementation of the SEL programme provides opportunities for students to develop social-emotional competencies, which are the tools for success in learning at school (Pang et al., 2018). SEL enables adolescents to cope with learning tasks in and outside the classroom. In this study, coping refers to the ability to use both cognitive and behavioural efforts to adjust to the situation as an individual interacts with the environment. SEL comprises self-awareness (identifying and recognising emotions, self-efficacy), self-management (impulse control and stress management, help-seeking), social awareness (empathy, respect for others), relationship management (communication, relationship building), and responsible decision-making (problem-solving, personal, social, and ethical responsibility) (Ahmed et al., 2020).

It is important to note that individual family background, nature, education experiences and social interaction usually affect individual social wellbeing. Contemporary schools, especially in developing nations, have much concern about the development of social-emotional competencies among learners, including instilling a sense of ethics, being responsive in decision-making, and a sense of integrity as well as self-respect (Ahmed et al., 2020; Dyson, Howley, and Shen, 2019; Vivekanandan and Pierre-Louis, 2020). In achieving this end, a number of social emotion management models have been used to ensure that students develop appropriate emotional intelligence (EI) (Huitt and Dawson, 2011; M. Elias et al., 2008). The widely adapted Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) have been used to enable both adolescents and adults to improve social and emotional skills. The practice is different in Tanzania regardless the education objective focusing on developing and appreciating national unity, identity, personal integrity and civic responsibility of the citizen (TIE, 2010, MoEST, 2023). The teaching in Tanzania embraces much cognitive knowledge and leaves aside the

social-emotional competencies among learners (Sospeter et al., 2020; Jukes et al., 2018), which are important for adolescent success in learning and social development after schooling.

Yet few studies in Tanzania investigate social-emotional skills and academic learning among adolescent students in school (Jukes et al., 2018; Yusuph, 2016). The social-emotional problem does not only account for or cope with learning but also involves intense achievement pressures, high levels of stress, and unemotional stability among adolescent students while at school (Spencer et al., 2018). Nevertheless, there is no evidence in Tanzania on the studies conducted addressing the role of social emotional skills on adolescents coping with learning in schools (Sospeter, Shavega, and Mnyanyi, 2020b; Musonga, 2017; Shavega, 2015) that makes an integrative skilled social emotional strategy with intervention study imperative in the Tanzanian context. Accomplishing the aim of this study, the study answered two research questions: 1) How social-emotional skills impact adolescent students coping with learning in secondary schools in Tanzania? 2) What strategies can be used to foster social-emotional competence (SEC) for adolescent students' success in learning?

2. Theoretical framework

This study was governed by functionalism theory. Functionalism, or structural functionalism, was developed by August Comte around the 1800s, who was called the father of sociology, which means the science of the social organism (Turner, 2014). To Comte, the essence of functionalism is to see the particular social structures and their effects as the social organisms in the environment. Specifically, Herbert Spencer, in 1874, extended functionalism theory from Comte's idea. To him, society is a structure that functions through its interrelated parts through shared customs, values, and norms. This study adapted functionalism theory as it views emotions as bidirectional processes of establishing, maintaining, and/or disrupting significant relationships between an organism and the (external or internal) environment (Barrett & Campos, 1987). Similarly, functionalism implies that for adolescent secondary school students to function interdependently (learn) better at school, they should be assured of a safe environment (cohesiveness, equilibrium, and solidarity-interdependence).

Thus, teachers need to counsel, advise, and use all necessary strategies to create a safe environment for adolescents in secondary schools to reduce fears, shyness, sadness, and anger that are freeing them from negative emotions. This creates a sense of interest, connectedness, and social awareness that seems vital for an individual to function at school. Davey et al. (2008) argue that negative emotions harm people, including adolescent secondary school students, as they may obstruct their learning in a good mood. Also, it implies that adolescent secondary school students need to work cooperatively when at school by enhancing pro-interaction retrospectively to avoid a sense of negative emotion. It is widely accepted that cooperation helps in maintaining solidarity, interdependence, and cohesiveness in doing school activities assigned by teachers.

2.3 Empirical Review of Related Literature

2.3.1   Social Emotional Skills Affect Adolescent Students Coping with Learning

Studies reveals that children with good social skills and good emotional competencies are more likely to succeed in coping with learning (Payton et al., 2008). In the same way, in Africa, the study by Musoga (2017) in Nakuru, Kenya, explored the guidance and counselling strategies used by preschool teachers in the behaviour management of preschool children. A survey research design was adopted with the use of both interviews and observation in data collection. It was found that children social and emotional behaviours include low self esteem, fear anger isolation and aggression. These practices were found to have impact on student school related learning habits. Similarly to this, Lddunuri (2013) study in Tanzania sought to identify the patterns and trends of adolescent students' sexual behaviours. The study used descriptive cross sectional research design. The study found a strong relationship between student behaviours and academic learning. Furthermore, Kambuga (2016) used descriptive study conducted in Dodoma found that teenagers experiences emotions such as anxiety, fear and isolation which has detrimental impact on the academic achievement. Little is on the social emotional competency and its influence on students coping in learning in secondary schools.

2.3.2 Strategies and Materials Designed to Improve SESs among Adolescent Students

According to studies effective teaching and learning at school depends highly on school meeting social and developmental needs of students. Students learn effectively in safety and conducive environment. SEL programmes at school increases social awareness and emotion management hence increase coping strategies among students at school. However, due to peer pressure, family dynamics, and inadequate interpersonal skills, children in Tanzania displayed aggressive and bullying tendencies (Mwereke, 2015). Bullying habits were thought to have an impact on Tanzanian children's academic achievement. However, as a tactic to help children develop their social emotional skills, teachers are urged to model and acknowledge proper social emotion behaviours (Sabattier, 2017, Corso, 2007). Conversely, researchers contend that helping teenagers work through challenging social and emotional issues by teaching them how to deal with peers, how to express difficult emotions in appropriate ways, and how to support peers with appropriate behaviours fosters the development of teenagers' social and emotional skills.

Micro express training was used in Ensari (2017) study in California, USA with the goal of improving emotional skills among teenager students. A pre-posttest was administered in a high school class with a quasi-experimental design. The result in the treatment group outperformed the control group. This indicates that student emotional skills improved as they experienced less stress. Furthermore, a study conducted by Durlak et al. (2010) in Chicago on high school noted that implementing SEL programme to student reduces malpractices behaviours such as bullying, drug abuse and use, interpersonal violence at school. The persistence of these programmes at school increases in ability to handle emotions that may affect student state to better coping in learning. These SEL encompasses social awareness, self-management, decision making, self-awareness and relationship skills

3. Methodology

Following a comprehensive assessment and expert appraisal, the study used a mixed research approach to produce the research guidelines and specifications with the assistance of a quasi-experimental and collaboration action research (CAR) design. Because CAR occurs in a natural setting and the researcher employs natural communication, it is typically a qualitative study (Dick and Swepson, 2013). Quantitative use with pre- and post-tests in the pilot and during field testing forms the basis of the quasi-experimental design. The pre-test was conducted at the beginning of school year and the post-test was administered at the end of school year. In order to prevent biases, it used treatment groups (TGs) and non-treatment groups (NTGs), which are believed to be comparable to stratified sampling (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). Treatment situation considered social emotional learning strategies such as attachment, assertion, cooperation, self-control and communication. The intervention was implemented focusing at enhancing emotional competency among adolescent student. The treatment was conducted during class hour and at the evening after class sessions. This design's goal was to highlight the differences between the two groups and determine whether those differences were caused by treatment or a controlled situation which further increased the external validity.

3.1 Population and Sample size

The total of 1454 pupils and 54 teachers from the public secondary schools in Tanzania's Hai district make up the study's population. Ten teachers and 244 students participated in the study. The study's moderate sample size made use of a hybrid methodology based on cooperative action research and quasi-experimental design (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interview was conducted with each teacher at the beginning and end of the intervention period. The interview aimed to gather in depth information about their experiences, challenges and the perceived effectiveness of the intervention. Likewise, for statistical analysis, a moderate sample size was suitable (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). The age range of the students employed in this study was 13 to 17.

3.2 Procedures and Instruments

The researcher obtained consent from participants to participate in the study and no compensation was made for their participation. Social emotional skills were assessed using the Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS) developed by Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, and Salovey (2006). The scale was adapted because of its applicability throughout different settings in measuring social emotional skills among individuals. The scale had four variables including; a) perceptions of emotions with (3 items for example, 'I understand ones feeling and thoughts'), b) Understanding emotions (2 items for example, 'I communicate my feeling to friends'), c) management of emotion (2 items for example 'I chill out when am angry') and d) use of emotions (4 items for example, 'I listen to my feeling in decision making, joyful activate my thinking in the class'). Instruments were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 very low to 5 very high the higher scores indicate the greater social emotional competence among adolescent students. The scale was valid and reliable with an alpha coefficient of $\alpha= 0.88$.

Social emotional strategies were assessed using the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) (Campbell et al., 2016). This was indeed a strong measure of social emotional strategies. It includes the following sub-constructs; communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement and self-control. The SSIS predicted the acceptable internal consistency of α=0.73. For the purposed of the study, the SSIS was appropriated in measuring the social emotional strategies. Social emotional strategies comprise 14 items each construct with 2 items examples of items in SSIS were 'attachment increases my learning interest', 'guidance and counselling improves anger management, 'exploration increases cooperation skills with others' and 'I tell my friend when in problem'.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive and regression analysis were used to analyse data obtained through questionnaires with the help of SPSS software version 21 by calculating mean and standard deviation. Whereby, qualitative data obtained through focus group discussion and semi structured interview were analysed using content by transcribing and developing themes that encapsulate the core findings.

4. Results

4.1 Social Emotional Skills and Adolescent Students Coping with Learning

Perception, understanding, management, and use of emotions were employed as predictors of students' ability to cope with learning in order to investigate the impact of social emotional abilities on students managing a learning challenge. In all four study variables, the overall results demonstrate a statistically significant association between students' social emotional skills and their ability to cope with learning. It was discovered that students' motivation in learning was positively impacted by their sense of emotions (β =.144, t(4, 239) = 2.141, p =.033) (see table 1). Significantly, it was discovered that students' ability to comprehend emotions was statistically related to their ability to adjust to learning in a classroom. As a result, talking to other students about one's feelings helped one to understand their own and others' feelings, which provided a foundation for coping strategies while learning at school. However, it was found that self-confidence negatively affects learning interest (β=-.016 t(4,239)=-.243, p=0.808), such that adolescents reported that confidence may negatively affect coping skills during interaction with peers at school. Also, the result shows that there were statistically significant effects between the management of emotions and coping with learning (β=0.093, t(4, 239)=1.391, p=0.166), such that students reported that social emotions distort their learning interest and active participation in the learning tasks assigned by teachers. They argued that self-management skills enable them to control social emotions like anger and loneliness, which were thought to negatively affect their learning ability during schooling.

Additionally, it was noted in the teacher interviews that the majority of the disruptive students do not actively participate in class learning, even when teachers provide exercises. As Teacher A from school B says,

"…Social emotions behaviours affected students learning, for example, most of the students who kick, pinch or fight in the class do not submit the exercise when provided with the

assignment and if they do so they do it very late compared to others who can understand ones feeling and others feel as well as can use emotions skills for peer interaction in the class and outside the class…" (Teacher A from school B).

This study demonstrates how aggressive behaviours, whether they occur outside or in the classroom, disrupt the learning environment and divert attention away from the task at hand and towards the conflict. Surprisingly, improving pupils' social and emotional skills may be the solution to their emotional struggles. It is significant to remember that social emotional skills improve emotional competency, which is crucial for enhancing individual learning. Table 1 shows the statistical relationship between students' usage of emotions and their motivation in learning ($\beta=0.201$, $t(4, 239)=3.030$, $p=0.003$). It has been observed that happiness and enthusiasm boost a person's capacity to concentrate on educational tasks because they enhance learners' reactivity to decisions.

Table 1. Coefficients for the Effects of Social Emotional Skills in Coping with Learning

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	3.173	.286		11.113	.000
	Perception of emotions	.106	.050	.144	2.141	.033
1	Understanding emotions	-.011	.046	-.016	-.243	.808
	Management of emotions	.076	.054	.093	1.391	.166
	Use of emotions	.163	.054	.201	3.030	.003

a. Dependent Variable: Interest in learning

Source: Field Survey, 2019.

3.4 Strategies Used to Foster Social Emotional Competence (SEC) for Adolescent Students to Succeed in Learning

The focus of this study was to look into methods for developing social and emotional skills in adolescents so they can do well academically. The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) questionnaire was utilised in this study in order to accomplish this goal. Overall statistics indicate that teachers promoted emotional competences in adolescents during their schooling by utilising a range of social-emotional tactics. These include having a tight social interaction with the student as a means of fostering emotional adjustment, as well as utilising the parents' calling approach. It was discovered, meanwhile, that not every parent reacts well when their child is called to school because of problems. According to this study, social emotional techniques lead to notable changes in academic, social, and emotional competencies as well as improvements in the quality of learning environments among students (Brackett and Rivers, 2013). Thus, it is expected that teachers adopting and implementing the proposed social

emotional strategies for adolescent students foster emotional intelligence which is the tool for academic success.

The findings show that students' emotional competencies were positively predicted by involvement (β=0.014, t(7, 236)=0.225, p=0.822). Instructors have noted that promoting pupils' attachment to their peers fosters a sense of community and enhances their literacy in social awareness. kids reported sharing social skills when playing with their close friends. The effect was medium (r = 0.537), meaning that kids' participation statistically fostered social emotional competencies for approximately 54% of the students. In contrast to students with low engagement skills, who typically exhibit disruptive behaviours that undermine emotional competencies, high engagement skill students were found to exhibit desirable attitudes like resilience, active participation, and social connectedness.

This was similar to what was reported during the focus group discussion with teachers, as one teacher argued that,

"…birds of the same feather flocks together…it is obvious that when a student joins peers who come to school late or fight at school it very likely s/he develops the habits of doing like his/her friend but when to attach to those who come early or perform nicely at school s/he is likely to do the same…"

This suggests that parents and other education stakeholders should make sure their kids are in a safe environment. This can be achieved by making sure that the friends they interact with throughout their time in school are reliable. The results are in line with those of Ensari (2017), who employed microexpression training in California, USA, with the goal of enhancing adolescents' emotional intelligence. A high school class was used for the pre- and post-test as part of the study's quasi-experimental approach. Students received practice questions ahead of time to help them become acquainted with the format and procedures of the pre-test. The results suggest that, when compared to the comparison control group (non-training), students in the treatment (training) group exhibit improvement (Ensari, 2017). This implies that students' social and emotional skills were improved as they were less stressed, which influenced them to cope with their learning ability at school. The results suggest that assertion statistically predicts all variables of social emotional competencies with the greatest impact on self-management (β =.042, t(7,236)=0.670, p = 0.504; see table 2).

Similarly, a statistically significant correlation was revealed between cooperation and self-management (β = 0.042, t(7,236)=0.670, p =.504), such that students' cooperation was reported to improve social networks and emotional competencies among individuals. It is important to note that during cooperation, students get used to sharing life skills such as active participation, responsiveness in decision-making, tolerance, and self-control. Tolerance skills, according to this study, imply being empathetic and understanding one's own and others' emotions, which leads to effective interaction among peers that is fruitful. Meanwhile, positive statistically significant effects were found between communication and social emotional competencies among adolescent students (β = 0.176, t = 3.091002); see table 2. It was reported that expressing feelings to an individual, especially key friends, gives an individual emotional

relief and improves self-awareness as well as self-management, which are important social-emotional competencies for success in learning at school.

Table 2. Strategies used to Foster Emotional Competencies for Success in Learning

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.672	.354		1.899	.059
	Engagement (attachment)	.011	.049	.014	.225	.822
	Assertion	.114	.059	.117	1.945	.053
	Cooperation	.038	.057	.042	.670	.504
	Self-control	.118	.060	.130	1.961	.051
	Responsibility	.210	.067	.196	3.122	.002
	Empathy	.176	.060	.185	2.926	.004
	Communication	.175	.057	.176	3.091	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Students coping with learning

Source: Field Survey, 2019

5. Discussion

An empirical analysis of social-emotional learning and how it affects teenagers' ability to learn in school is provided by this study. Specifically, a critical discussion of social emotional abilities, social emotional strategies, and coping emotional skills was conducted in light of the study's findings. The study offers comprehensive, in-depth information about the impact of social emotional skills on students coping with learning in an effort to investigate the effects of social emotional skills and the approach to be employed in promoting emotional competencies for teenagers coping with learning. According to these reports, future teenage life education suffers if these social-emotional issues are not critically examined and addressed through formal programmes, which is why the current study found them significant (Sospeter et al., 2020).

This is accomplished by instilling a love and zeal for peers and teachers during education, which appears to be a catalyst for social cohesiveness. This study continues a trend started by researchers (Langenkamp and Shifrer, 2018; Yu et al., 2018) who investigated the social relationships of adolescents and explained to teachers the observation that adolescents improve learning outcomes because they have better social and emotional skills, which help students learn coping mechanisms while they are in school. But Spencer et al. (2018) looked at how stressed out females felt about doing well in school in the future. The study found that students worry about succeeding in collaborative learning.

It's significant to note that Fu and Law (2018) claimed that an adolescent's capacity to negotiate and develop future tasks, such as self-expression and emotional control, is enhanced by the

quality of their attachment to their carer. This suggests that since self-expression and emotional control affect self-adjustment over emotional issues, these skills are critical in adolescents. Given this, the study aligns with the findings of Bourgeois et al. (2014), Boyd et al. (2010), and Davey et al. (2008), who suggested that teenage students' social competency affects their chances of learning. Similarly, Cherniss (2000) and Goleman (2011) contend that students' ability, motivation, and attention spans are influenced by pleasant emotions, which in turn affect academic learning.

According to Raver's (2002) findings, kids who are emotionally well-adjusted are far more likely to succeed in school from an early age, whereas kids who struggle with their emotions greatly increase their chances of having substantial problems in school. They don't even actively participate in cooperative learning, communication, or study sessions at school, and they appear distant from their friends. Scholars have noted that peer relationships appear to provide time and attention as well as more support for adolescents in managing high levels of pressure and emotional problems (Spencer et al., 2018; Worker, Iaccopucci, Bird, and Horowitz, 2019). This suggests that peer relationships play a crucial role in the development of adolescents' social identity and cohesiveness. The results align with the functionalism idea, which posited that mental entities possess diverse roles similar to those of creatures. According to some research (Institutes for Research, 2015; Spencer et al., 2018), parents, students, peer groups, and teachers as experts all contribute to the development of these social and emotional competences. This is consistent with the claims made by Mbae (2013) and Williams-Mbengue (2013) that a collaborative classroom approach maximises students' social and emotional learning, which are critical for academic achievement. It is crucial to stress that the results are derived from a limited sample of Tanzanian secondary schools and are both descriptive and inferential in nature. Thus, caution will be taken into account when applying these findings broadly.

The study has several limitations that should be considered. The sample of the study was confined to adolescents aged 13-17 years old; thus, the findings cannot be generalised to adolescents above 17 years old. The future study shall include a sample size of adolescents over 17 years old for a more representative sample.

6. Conclusion

Considering how social emotions can both hinder and help teenage pupils deal with their education. Due to their effects on fostering emotional intelligence, social emotional skills are significant for a variety of educational stakeholders, including legislators, curriculum designers, teenagers, and curriculum implementers (in this case, teachers). Adolescents' social-emotional skills need to be strengthened in order to help them deal with emotional issues that could interfere with their education. According to the study, social emotional skills have an impact on students' ability to cope with learning because they allow people to control their own and other people's emotions when making responsive decisions during classroom instruction.

Therefore, it was determined that teenage students should be taught social-emotional techniques such communication skills, cooperative skills, empathy, engagement, assertiveness, and responsiveness skills in order to build these social-emotional competences for sustainable learning. Students' social-emotional capabilities are enhanced by these abilities, which are critical for academic achievement. Secondary schools must therefore implement the agent model for managing adolescents who are experiencing a learning difficulty in order to produce graduates who are emotionally intelligent, healthy, and competitive enough to compete on a national and worldwide level in order to realise Tanzania's 2030 vision.

7. Compliance with Ethical Standards

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Also, ethical issues were concerned as per policy and regulation in research conducting, informed consent was sought and proper acknowledgement was adhered to.

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