T.E.T. Research from Estonia
as it relates to Social Emotional Competencies
(2024)

SUMMARY

The starting point of the study (published in 2024) was examining social-emotional competence using the frameworks of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) and EASEL (Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning).

These frameworks describe social-emotional competence as a set of knowledge, skills, and beliefs related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Developing teachers' social-emotional competence is essential as it supports their ability to cope with stress, job satisfaction, and perceived well-being related to the school environment. In 2023, an analysis of training programmes supporting the development of Estonian teachers' socialemotional competence was commissioned by the Health Development Institute.

Based on this analysis, the Gordon Teachers' School [**T.E.T., Teacher Effectiveness Training**] and the Minutes of Stillness Teacher Course may be most suitable for developing this competence in Estonia. The aim of the present study was to evaluate which social-emotional skills these two training programmes develop and their impact on aspects related to teaching, including self-efficacy, coping with work stress, and relationships with students and colleagues.

The study analysed which individual and environmental factors influence the development and application of teachers' social-emotional competence in their daily work. Additionally, a tool adapted for Estonian teachers to measure socialemotional competence was developed and tested for the first time during the study to systematically and reliably assess the impact of the training on teachers. In the pilot study, the target group was divided into three: six training groups participating in the Gordon Teachers' School, six in the Minutes of Stillness Teacher Course, and a control group whose members responded to pre- and post-surveys.

The sample included 207 teachers, 23 of whom were individually interviewed. In addition, all seven trainers and two training providers were interviewed. For assessing the implementation accuracy, the trainers also filled in trainer diaries. The study showed that both training programmes are practical and experiential, focusing on the development of communication skills and self-management. The trainings' accuracy of application was high.

The main motives for participating in the training were the desire for professional and personal development, improving communication skills, and coping with stress. The practicality of the training and the opportunity to participate for free also served as motivation. Most participants were highly satisfied with the training and would recommend it to colleagues; expectations were met and even exceeded.

Participants were particularly satisfied with the atmosphere created during the training, the trainer, and the practical focus of the training. There were no statistically significant differences between the two training groups in terms of satisfaction levels or the likelihood of recommending the training. The main factors supporting the application of what was learned were practical exercises, training materials, trainer guidance and encouragement, support from colleagues and management, and sharing experiences with fellow participants.

The main obstacles to application were a lack of time, 7 heavy workloads, old habits, stressful situations, resistance from colleagues and management, and an inability to use the learned skills with certain target groups. During the course of the study, the Õp-SEP questionnaire was developed, which was based more on the EASEL framework, but certain modifications were introduced to it.

The study results indicated that both the Gordon Teachers' School and the Minutes of Stillness Teacher Course significantly contributed to the development of teachers' social-emotional competence, with a focus on cognitive and social dimensions. The study did not confirm progress in the emotional dimension (based on the questionnaire, mainly affective empathy), likely due to methodological reasons.

According to qualitative data, both training programmes significantly improved self-awareness, self-management, and interpersonal skills. When interpreting the results, however, it should be borne in mind that the present study is limited to teachers' own assessments of their competence, and that the development of a tool to measure the socio-emotional competence of Estonian teachers will be developed further. In addition to the development of social-emotional competence, the training programmes impacted teachers' relationships, job satisfaction, and coping with stress. Teachers who participated in the training felt more confident and capable of managing their emotions and improving the classroom environment.

They perceived an improvement in relationships, particularly in relationship skills with students and in their personal lives, with the Minutes of Stillness training group also noting better relationships with colleagues, but not with management in either group. Participants in the Gordon training highlighted improvements in listening skills, reflecting, and the positive impact of "Imessages" on the quality, creation, and maintenance of relationships, while those in the Minutes of Stillness training noted increased self-control and better consideration of differences. Participation in the trainings helped many teachers restore their confidence in their abilities and desire to work as teachers.

The study confirmed that competence training for teachers, such as the Gordon Teachers' School and the Minutes of Stillness Teacher Course, are effective tools for teachers' professional and personal development, but their successful implementation depends on consistent practice and support from the school staff.

The training helped improve teachers' self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills, which in turn supported positive changes in the classroom and job satisfaction. It became clear that the impact of the trainings is greater when participants receive sufficient support and opportunities to consistently practise the skills they have learned. The development of social-emotional competence was most influenced by the participants' own motivation and interest, but support from colleagues and management, as well as a positive atmosphere during the training, were also important.

The study report lists recommendations to various stakeholders on improving the social-emotional competence of Estonian teachers. It is recommended that Estonian teachers be given the opportunity to participate in the Gordon Teachers' School and the Minutes of Stillness Teacher Course for free or at a reduced cost. School management is advised to raise awareness of social-emotional competence, create an organisational culture that supports its implementation and teaching, and ensure sufficient time, as well as to establish unified principles within the school, ensure equal opportunities for participation in training, and support also the management's participation in training on social8 emotional competence.

Universities are recommended to place more emphasis on providing practical skills related to social-emotional competence in basic teacher education. For providers of social-emotional competence training, recommendations on how to make the training even more effective are provided. Proposals were formulated for the development of a tool to measure this competence, diversifying the statements in the emotional skills measurement tool, and measuring the impact of the training from the students' perspective as well.

Finally, based on the feedback from teachers who completed the training, recommendations were compiled for teachers on how to apply the different dimensions of social-emotional competence in everyday schoolwork.

Link to study (English summary found on page 7-8): https://tai.ee/sites/default/files/2024-09/opetajate_sotsiaal-emotsionaalse_padevuse_arengut_toetavate_koolituste_hindamise_uuring.pdf