

# THE NEED FOR EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND A QUANTITATIVE MEASURE BASED ON EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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**A** – study design, **B** – data collection, **C** – statistical analysis, **D** – interpretation of data, **E** – manuscript preparation, **F** – literature review, **G** – sourcing of funding

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The scope of emotional competence and the definition of individual differences therein is still a matter of scientific debate. So, too, is the inclusion of emotional awareness as an important feature of emotional competence.

**Aim of the study:** To explore levels of emotional awareness in relation to a *predefined* six factors model. This study will also examine the ability to measure emotional competence with empirical research.

**Material and methods:** For this study, a self-report questionnaire (EAQ30) is used to assesses emotional awareness in children. Here, emotional awareness is described as the “ability of people to differentiate, express, analyze and pay attention to their own emotions and those of others” emotions and those of others”. Participants were recruited as a representative group of N = 27 11-year-old children.

**Results:** We found that scores in two dimensions – ‘acting out emotions’ and ‘bodily awareness’, were lower in comparison to the other four dimensions from the emotional awareness measure.

**Conclusions:** Individual differences in emotional awareness have shown to have a significant impact on important life outcomes for children and adolescents, including mental and physical health, successful academic behavior and achievement, and social relationships. It is important to proceed with attempts to measure emotional awareness in young people with valid empirical investigations, and to develop new models for emotional training that are capable of enhancing emotional functioning.

**KEYWORDS:** emotional awareness, children, adolescents, self-report questionnaire

## BACKGROUND

Why do we need to teach children about emotions?

With their brains growing at a rapid rate, children constantly notice, react, adapt, and develop their ideas based on their emotional experiences. This is why we need to equip them with an emotional education that can improve their quality of life. Teaching children how to recognize their feelings, understand where they come from, and learn how to deal with them is considered to be an essential skill for success in life.

People respond in a variety of ways to the experiences they encounter. Some people immerse themselves in the situation they experience, others attempt to do so, whilst others don't seem to be able to do so at all [1]. Based on these observations, it seems that emotional awareness is required before coping responses can be applied to a given situation. Moreover, a precise and elaborate awareness – i.e. an analysis of the exact nature of the emotion, the eliciting antecedents, and possible consequences – enhances the like-

lihood of finding a more adaptive approach to a given situation [2].

Emotional awareness consists of individual differences in the way that people differentiate, express, analyze, and pay attention to their own emotions and the emotions of others [3]. Emotional awareness is an important feature of emotional competence. The term ‘emotional competence’ is used to capture all of the different aspects of emotional functioning, such as identification of emotions, regulation of emotions, emotion expression, and empathy.

Emotional competence can be defined as the ability to purposefully and fully express a variety of emotions, understand the emotions of self and others, and regulate emotional expressiveness and experiences when necessary [4]. Emotional competence undergoes dramatic changes within the first five years of life, which coincides with increased ability to express more sophisticated, nuanced, and regulated emotions. There is also an age-related increase in the ability to understand, identify, and empathize with others' emotions.

Although there are some debates in the literature, many studies have associated higher emotional competence with physical and mental health [5,6]. The first studies examining the role of emotional competence in children and adolescents adapting to their environment revealed that self-reported emotional competence was associated with positive social behaviors [7], as well as with physical and psychological health [8].

Given the individual differences in emotional competence across the lifespan, it is critical to have a valid and reliable instrument for measuring variability in emotional competence, particularly for child and adolescent populations. Although some questionnaires on trait emotional intelligence have been adapted for children, we assert that the most appropriate tool for examining emotional awareness as part of emotional competence to date is the Emotion Awareness Questionnaire for children – EAQ30 [9]. The EAQ30 is specifically designed to identify emotional awareness, which refers to an attentional process, for e.g., ability to monitor and differentiate emotions. The EAQ30 also examines attitudes towards emotions, for e.g., how are emotions and their corresponding expressions valued [9]. The EAQ30 shows good psychometric properties and good criterion validity with a related measure of emotional self-efficacy, the TEIQue. Additionally, the EAQ30 shows good concurrent validity with respect to common internalizing problems experienced by children and adolescents, including somatic complaints, social anxiety, depression, and a tendency for non-productive thinking (e.g., worry, rumination). In addition, a cross-cultural study demonstrated that the EAQ30 accurately captures the structure of children's emotional dispositions, regardless of cultural differences [3].

Emotional awareness is closely related with the construct of emotional intelligence. Although there are ongoing debates about the scope and the status of emotional intelligence, the most predominant thesis refers it emotional intelligence as individual differences in the perception, processing, regulation, and utilization of emotional information [10].

In accordance with the debate on the status of emotional intelligence as an ability or trait, a tripartite model of emotional intelligence has been developed [11]. This model posits that there are three levels of emotional intelligence: knowledge, abilities, and traits. The knowledge level refers to the complexity and width of emotional knowledge, where the focus is on what people know about emotions and how to deal with emotion-laden situations. The ability level refers to the ability to apply emotion knowledge in an emotional situation, and to implement a given strategy. The trait level refers to emotion-related dispositions, namely the propensity to behave in a certain way in emotional situations.

The same tripartite model can be seen in the structure of EAQ30, where the questions in the six scales attempt to estimate a child's ability to differentiate between various emotions, their knowledge and tendency to analyze their feelings and talk about them, their

attention to bodily symptoms of an emotional arousal, their attention to others' feelings, and their propensity to behave in particular ways in emotional situations.

## AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to explore levels of emotional awareness in relation to a predefined six factors model. This study also examines the ability to measure emotional competence with empirical research

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

A representative group of N = 27 11-year-old children participated in this study. Prior to participating in the study, parental permission was obtained.

The EAQ30 is a self-report questionnaire developed specifically for children and adolescents, and aims to identify what children feel and think about their own emotions and the emotions of others. It was developed in correspondence with the Toronto Alexithymia Scale [12], the Children's Depression Inventory [13], the Worry Questionnaire [14] and the Somatic Complaint List [15]. The EAQ30 was designed with a six-factor structure that represents various aspects of emotional functioning and consists of a total of 30 items. Some of the items are negatively formulated and thus subsequently reverse-scored. Respondents are asked to rate the degree to which each item is true about him or herself on a three-point scale (1 = not true, 2 = sometimes true, 3 = often true). The questionnaire is composed of six dimensions:

1. *Differentiating Emotions* is the ability to differentiate discrete emotions and locate their antecedents;
2. *Bodily Awareness* is the cluster of physical sensations of emotions;
3. *Analyses of Emotions* and
4. *Attending to Others' Emotions* identify children's interest in facing their own and others' emotions, respectively;
5. *Not Hiding Emotions* refers to the tendency to not attempt to conceal personal feelings
6. *Verbal Sharing* of emotions refers to verbal aspects of communication.

## RESULTS

Group results can be found in tab. 1. Overall, scores on dimensions of 'hiding emotions' and 'bodily awareness' were lower in comparison than scores on the other four dimensions, as shown in fig. 1.

## DISCUSSION

We compared our results with a representative study, with participants from the Netherlands (N = 665), Spain (N = 464) and Belgium (N = 707) used for cross-validation of the EAQ30 [3] (see fig. 2). Results show that the factor 'not hiding emotions' has the lowest score compared to

Table 1. Results from the conducted study

Participants number	Dimensions of emotional awareness						
	Differentiating emotions	Verbal sharing	Not hiding emotions	Bodily awareness	Attending to others' emotions	Analyses of emotions	Emotional awareness
Average score	2.11	2.14	1.85	1.86	2.69	2.19	2.14
1	2.43	2.67	2.20	2.40	2.40	2.80	2.48
2	2.43	1.67	2.00	2.60	2.60	1.80	2.18
3	1.86	2.00	2.00	1.40	3.00	2.80	2.18
4	2.57	2.00	2.40	1.40	2.80	2.80	2.33
5	2.14	2.00	2.40	1.60	3.00	1.60	2.12
6	1.57	1.33	1.40	1.40	2.80	2.00	1.75
7	2.00	2.33	1.60	1.60	2.60	1.20	1.89
8	2.43	2.67	1.80	3.00	2.40	2.40	2.45
9	1.57	2.33	1.20	2.40	3.00	2.60	2.18
10	2.29	2.00	2.20	2.20	2.60	2.60	2.31
11	1.71	2.00	2.00	1.80	3.00	1.80	2.05
12	2.71	1.33	2.20	2.00	2.20	1.00	1.91
13	2.43	2.67	1.80	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.32
14	1.71	2.33	1.80	1.60	2.80	1.60	1.97
15	2.29	1.67	1.60	2.20	2.60	1.80	2.03
16	2.00	2.33	1.40	1.60	2.60	1.80	1.96
17	2.29	2.33	1.20	1.20	2.80	2.00	1.97
18	1.71	2.67	1.80	1.40	2.80	2.80	2.20
19	2.43	2.67	2.20	3.00	2.40	2.60	2.55
20	2.00	2.67	2.20	2.20	1.80	2.20	2.18
21	2.29	2.33	1.60	2.60	2.40	1.80	2.17
22	2.29	2.00	2.20	1.60	3.00	2.20	2.21
23	1.00	1.67	1.60	1.00	2.60	3.00	1.81
24	2.57	2.33	1.60	2.00	2.80	2.00	2.22
25	1.57	1.67	2.40	1.20	3.00	3.00	2.14
26	2.43	2.00	1.80	1.40	2.80	2.40	2.14
27	2.14	2.00	1.40	1.40	2.80	2.60	2.06

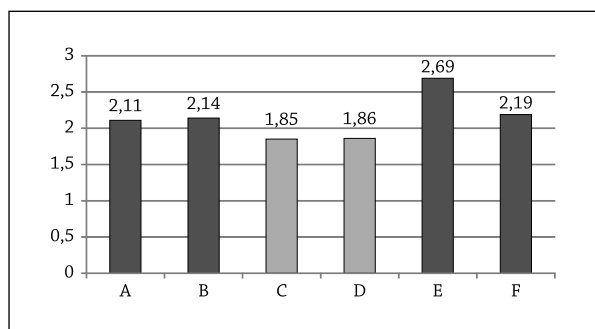


Figure 1. Over scores on dimensions of emotional awareness  
 A – Differentiating Emotions; B – Bodily Awareness; C – Analyses of Emotions; D – Attending to Others' Emotions; E – Not Hiding Emotions; F – Verbal Sharing

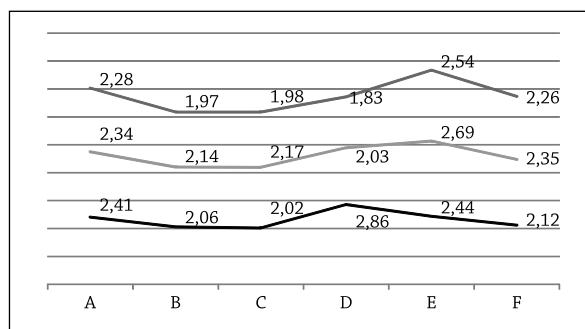


Figure 2. EAQ30 scores in samples from the Netherlands (top line), Spain (middle line), and Belgium (bottom line).  
 A – Differentiating Emotions; B – Bodily Awareness; C – Analyses of Emotions; D – Attending to Others' Emotions; E – Not Hiding Emotions; F – Verbal Sharing

the other four factors in the Netherlands sample, and 'bodily awareness' has the lowest score compared with the other four factors in the Spain and Belgium samples.

It can be seen, that the factor 'not hiding emotions' has the lowest score in comparison with the other four factors in Netherlands sample and the factor 'bodily awareness' has the lowest score in comparison with the other four factors in the sample of Spain and Belgium.

These results prompt some questions:

1. Will the factors 'not hiding emotions' and 'bodily awareness' always show the lowest scores when compared to scores on the other four factors of emotional awareness?

2. Can specific efforts be made in the direction of developing some strategies to increase scores on the two aforementioned factors – 'not hiding emotions' and 'bodily awareness'? If there is growth in scores for these factors, will higher scores on these factors correlate with higher on the other four factors, and with overall scores of emotional awareness?

Nonetheless, a goal should be to create and implement assessments, such as emotional training programs, to improve on children and adolescents' skills and abilities or other appropriate measures. It is also

important to identify survey measures that are appropriate for approximating social and emotional development of young children and adolescents.

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the ongoing debate regarding the nature and scope of emotional intelligence, it is clear that supporting the emotional development of young children is crucial for their success in school as well as in other

settings, and for their life into adulthood. Healthy emotional development is also associated with later ability to function in family, school, peer situations and other contexts, and is often connected with good physical health. For these reasons, it is important to create and develop training methods and good practices that aim to enhance children and adolescents' emotion-related dispositions. Moreover, it is clear that emotional intelligence is an active and essential ingredient of life success and happiness.

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