

# The effect of origin on children's social-emotional competence<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*In this world of quick changes and uncertainty we now live, people need to adapt to all these changes and make decisions about new situations in their everyday life, decisions seemingly not faced in the past. The large numbers of immigrants and refugees, economic crisis, increasing inequality and the infringement of human rights have raised global concern. The need to be foster identities can be seen as one of the reasons why people need to develop themselves ethically, emotionally, personally, and socially in a healthy manner. Social – emotional competence (SEC) is considered a major factor of a person's personality. This paper analyzes the effect of cultural differentiation upon children's social-emotional competence. More specifically, the importance of origin, either children's or their parents' while forming SEC is presented. The model used is the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) model, which focuses on five dimensions of SEC: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship management and responsible decision-making. The questionnaire presented is based on the Social – Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ), which is then correlated to the factor of origin. The results extracted are very important and impressive, as mother's origin affects much more positively children's social-emotional competence than father's origin. This concerns children who are born in Greece and one of their parents comes from abroad. On the other hand, the lowest scores of social-emotional competence were done by children who were born abroad both they and their parents.*

## Keywords

SEC, origin, culture, differentiation

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<sup>1</sup> If this paper is quoted or referenced, we ask that it be acknowledged as:  
Vegiannis, I. (2020). The effect of origin on children's social-emotional competence. In B. Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & V. Zorbas (Eds.), *Citizenship at a Crossroads: Rights, Identity, and Education* (pp. 333 - 345). Prague, CZ: Charles University and Children's Identity and Citizenship European Association. ISBN: 978-80-7603-104-3.

## **The problem stated**

Our world is characterized by rapid changes in all areas of everyday life. Geographic, socio-economic, political and cultural alterations have transformed the world into a whole, the main feature of which is diversity. The large number of immigrants and refugees and the economic crisis are two basic parameters that reinforce heterogeneity on multiple levels. Everyday circumstances show that these changes, as a result of globalization, exacerbate inequality and violation of human rights, which has provoked world interest. Citizens of the 21st Century living within this framework must develop critical thinking and adaptability skills, in order to make decisions about issues that may not have previously been dealt with.

For this reason, in a world clearly technocratic, with a constantly changing form, the acquisition of knowledge and cognitive development is not the only issue. Adaptation to the new era requires a set of skills related to values, such as acceptance, cooperation, critical thinking, respect, empathy, solidarity etc.

One of the terms referred in the bibliography concerning those characteristics is social – emotional competence (SEC). It is considered to be in the center of an individual's decision-making and includes thinking before a decision and the behavior that results from it (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Goleman (2001) and Greenspan & Driscoll (1997) have shown that socio-emotional competence justifies a significant percentage of successful human behavior (PI, 2011).

The importance of SEC for the healthy development of the individual's personality is reflected in the definition given by the Center for Socio-Emotional Competence at the Young Age. According to it, SEC refers to the person's “evolving ability to create secure and solid interpersonal relationships, to recognize and express his feelings and to learn, within socially and culturally acceptable frames” (Yates et al., 2008, pg. 2). SEC allows the individual to acquire and use effectively the knowledge, behavior and skills required to understand and manage his/her feelings, positive targeting, empathy toward others, the creation of beneficial interpersonal relationships and responsible decisions (Weissberg et al., 2015).

All these must be seriously taken into consideration by all countries' educational systems, in order to plan and apply techniques, which aim to children's total development. Children have to be educated how to learn, have critical thinking, self-discipline, creativity and skills of co-operation. In that way, SEC becomes of first priority for schools, as it plays a very important role in success in work, study and social life. Children with high socio-emotional competence are more popular, have high social skills, are less aggressive and better respond to learning processes. At home they have closer relationships with their family. At work, they strengthen teamwork by working with others and helping them to learn (Al - Tamimi, E. & Al - Khawadeh, N., 2016).

Furthermore, considering that modern classes have strong elements of heterogeneity among pupils, exploring whether this cultural differentiation

affects emotional expression, social adaptation and children's decision-making has been a research challenge that has highlighted many questions to answer. However, a gap was observed in the study of SEC in multicultural classes, during the bibliographic review. Also, there have not been found sufficient studies, which investigate the influence of origin as one of the many elements of cultural differentiation of modern classes in the social and emotional development of students.

### **CASEL's model about social-emotional competence**

This research uses CASEL's model about social-emotional competence. According to CASEL (2013), SEC is the procedure through which children and adults are able to manage effectively their own feelings and their interpersonal relationships, as well as make responsible decisions. Many researchers (Durlak et al., 2011; Goleman, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003) have claimed that children who have the characteristics above are more successful at school and in their life (CASEL, 2013).

CASEL (2017) refers to social-emotional competence's abilities, which are divided in five sectors:

- i. **Self-awareness:** It's the person's ability to recognize his/her own feelings, thoughts and values and how they affect his/her behavior. Self-awareness ensures that the person a) can determinate his/her feelings, b) has high self-esteem and c) is aware of his/her personal powers. Carver and Scheier (1981) mention that, if children are educated to apprehend and manage effectively their feelings, they will be able to make responsible decisions in their entire life.
- ii. **Social awareness:** It's the person's ability to show empathy towards others, including culturally differentiated people or people coming from any kind of heterogeneity. Some values of social awareness are empathy, the acceptance of difference and respect. Children with highly developed empathy tend to also have more perceptual sensitivity and be more altruistic (Zhou & Ee, 2012).
- iii. **Self-management:** It's the person's ability to regulate his/her own feelings, thoughts and behaviors in different situations, like stress management, control of impulses or motivation. People learn to self-discipline, set personal goals and organize their actions, in order to achieve them. Eisenberg's research (1995), as presented in Zhou and Ee (2012), referred that children, who can't adopt their feelings in different situations, often show anti-social behavior.
- iv. **Relationship management:** It's the person's ability to create healthy relationships with different people and social groups. It also refers to the capacity of communicating in a clear way, being a good listener, cooperating with others, effectively managing conflicts and offering help

when others need. Sage and Kindermann (1999) and Wentzel (1999), who are mentioned by Zhou and Ee (2012), found that children, who are rejected from peers and are isolated, are more likely to abandon their academic goals and leave school.

- v. **Decision making:** It's the person's ability to make responsible decisions about his/her behavior and his/her social interactions according to the existing moral and social rules. It also refers to a) the realistic evaluation of the consequences of any decision made, b) the recognition of doubtful situations, c) their solution and d) moral responsibility. Decision making demands education related to the development of social responsibility (Ormond et al., 1991).

### **The influence of origin on the development of social-emotional competence**

In this multicultural world we now live, it is basic to clarify how culture affects social-emotional competence. In a research that investigates the correlation between them, what is needed is a deeper comprehension of the cultural background and the conditions, in which it is presented (e.g., school, family, neighborhood etc.).

Culture is closely related to intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities of people. Hoffman (2009) studied emotional experiences and their expression in different social circumstances. He found that even emotions that are considered as universal have a different meaning in every culture. For instance, in more individualistic societies anger is necessary, in order to guard personal needs interests. In more collective societies, anger is a shameful emotion, as it may influence negatively the harmony between social groups. Furthermore, personal characteristics, like temperament or affection towards others, are deeply affected by each person's cultural background and reflect his/her family values (Bricker, Davis & Squires, 2004).

Other studies (Chen & French, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992) have shown that SEC is affected by the cultural background of each individual and the way it appears in any social context (Westerhof, 2017, p. 52). Characteristics, such as temperament and devotion to others, are deeply affected by the individual's cultural origins and reflect their family values (Bricker, Davis & Squires, 2004).

Assessing the level of SEC of children from diverse cultural environments should take into account two important facts. First, each culture provides a framework within which the child shapes his/her identity and his/her worldview. Hudley (2001), as presented by Barblett and Maloney (2010), through his research has shown that there may be a great deal of misunderstanding of the social and emotional needs of children if their cultural background is not taken into

consideration. The second is that most research tools have been planned on the norms of the middle classes of white people. These tools tend to characterize children who are not included in the dominant social groups as abnormal or divergent (Barblett & Maloney, 2010).

This research focuses on the effect of origin on children's SEC. In particular, children who, as well as their parents, come from another country, are facing much greater changes than those born themselves and / or one parent in the host country. Incoming citizens in a new country may face significant challenges during their establishment related to their experiences during migration. These challenges refer mostly to the need to adapt their identity to new conditions and cultural / social contexts. These people spend a "period of silence" as long as their adaptation to the new environment persists, but their personal, socio-emotional and academic needs are the same as those of native citizens. Immigrants and refugees often leave behind already established social contexts, such as their family, friends and neighborhood / community. For this reason, these pupils need additional support in adapting to the new social and cultural context and the role of the school in this direction is particularly important. A study by Ladson-Billings (1995) showed that immigrant pupils may feel socially and culturally alienated, even if they have high school / academic scores. The study by Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin (2009) notes that the successful adaptation of culturally diverse learners, particularly immigrants / refugees, is strongly influenced by the quality of social networks that they will develop within the school. These social relationships provide a set of values and facilities, such as emotional support, information, guidance and feedback. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2008) report that the SEC of such pupils strongly depends on their interactions with adult school members.

With the composition of classes, therefore, being no longer culturally diverse, the socialization of children at school can either increase or neutralize cultural influences. Samples (1997), as reported by Petrowski et al., (2009), identified differences in perceptions of rules, expressed emotions, conflict management within a multicultural class, depending on the children's background.

## **Aims of the research**

This research focuses on students' social-emotional competence, as part of their moral development. It refers to their capacity to self-regulate their behavior and their learning procedure and includes abilities, such as recognizing and controlling of sentiments, caring for others, creating of positive interpersonal relationships, responsible decision making and managing moral dilemmas (Zhou & Ee, 2012).

The aim of the research is to investigate the five domains of social-emotional competence, as analyzed above, according to CASEL's model, and the effect of origin on them.

## Methodology of the research

The target group of this research were students from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> class of Primary Schools of Western Greek District. The research tool that was chosen was the questionnaire and the method of sample was collected by random sampling. The total research to Primary Schools of Western Greek District included 1.006 students.

## Description of the questionnaire

The research tool that was chosen was the questionnaire, which was based on the Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire, created by Zhou & Ee (2012).

In the introduction, students had to declare their demographic elements (gender, class, their own and their parents' origin and religion). In the first part, they had to rate 25 sentences concerning the five domains of social-emotional competence (five sentences for each domain) choosing the appropriate answer in a six-degree scale from "Never" to "Always". For instance, *"I understand why I do what I do"* (self-awareness), *"If a friend is upset, I have a pretty good idea why"* (social awareness), *"I can stay calm in stressful situations"* (self-management), *"I am tolerant of my friends' mistakes"* (relationship management), *"I consider the criteria chosen before making a consideration"* (decision making).

In the second part, they had to rate ten sentences about the criteria that influence decision making. The rating scale included choices from "Not at all" to "Very much". For instance, *"When making a decision, I care if my decision hurts someone"*, *"When making a decision, I care if my decision obeys my family's rules"*.

Finally, in the third part, children were given five moral dilemmas they may face in their everyday life and they had to choose how they would react to each of them. For instance, *"While walking you find a wallet, which has 500 € and an identity card. What do you do? A) You keep the wallet, B) You give it to the police, C) Anything of the above, you do something else"*.

## Findings of the research

Concerning the participants' demographical elements, they are presented below (N = 1.006).

- a) **Gender:** Male participants were 504 (50,1%) and female participants were (49,9%) N=502.
- b) **Class:** 262 students (26%) were in the 4<sup>th</sup> class of Primary School, 354 students (35,2%) were in the 5<sup>th</sup> class of Primary School, 390 students (38,8%) were in the 6<sup>th</sup> class of Primary School.

- c) **Origin of students and their parents:** 983 students (97,7%) were born in Greece and 23 students (2,3%) were born in another country. 903 students (89,8%) had their father born in Greece, whereas 103 students' father (10,2%) was born in another country. 877 students' mother was born in Greece (87,2%) and 129 students' mother was from another country (12,8%).
- d) **Religion:** 960 students (95,4%) were Christians (either orthodox or catholic), 17 students (1,7%) were Muslims, 21 students (2,1%) were unbaptized and 8 of them chose the answer "Other" (0,8%).

GLM Univariate analysis was done, in order to study the effect of origin on children's social-emotional competence. This kind of analysis was done for each of the five domains of SEC separately, as well as the whole SEC.

Our zero hypothesis (Ho) was that children's means of answers were equal independently of their and/or their parents' origin. Our alternative hypothesis (Ha) was that these means differed according to students' and/or their parents' origin. The level of statistical significance was  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The tables following show what SPSS indicated as statistically significant.

Table 1a shows the effect of origin on children's self-awareness (which was calculated as the sum of the five corresponding sentences concerning self-awareness). It seems that among all the possible combinations, what is statistically significant on a child's self-awareness is his/her parents' origin, as  $F(1,998) = 4,265, p = 0.039 < \alpha$ .

**Table 1a:** Effect of parents' origin on children's self-awareness

|                   | Type III Sum of Squares | df   | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model   | 108.920                 | 7    | 15.560      | 1.137    | .338 | .008                |
| Intercept         | 33892.752               | 1    | 33892.752   | 2475.664 | .000 | .713                |
| Father's origin * |                         |      |             |          |      |                     |
| Mother's origin   | 58.390                  | 1    | 58.390      | 4.265    | .039 | .004                |
| Error             | 13662.989               | 998  | 13.690      |          |      |                     |
| Total             | 669965.000              | 1006 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total   | 13771.910               | 1005 |             |          |      |                     |

The overview of the combining groups' means gives more details on the direction of their differences. Table 1b shows the effect of parents' origin on children's answers concerning the domain of self-awareness.

**Table 1b:** Analysis of the effect of parents' origin on children's self-awareness

| Father's origin | Mother's origin | Mean   | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                 |                 |        |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Greece          | Greece          | 24.110 | 1.070      | 22.011                  | 26.210      |
|                 | Other country   | 27.321 | .959       | 25.438                  | 29.203      |
| Other country   | Greece          | 25.767 | 1.353      | 23.113                  | 28.421      |
|                 | Other country   | 24.746 | .551       | 23.665                  | 25.827      |

Students, whose father is from Greece and mother comes from another country, had higher scores ( $M = 27,32$ ,  $SE = 0,96$ ) than students, whose both parents come from Greece ( $M = 24,11$ ,  $SE = 1,07$ ). On the other hand, students, whose father comes from another country and mother is Greek, had higher scores ( $M = 25,77$ ,  $SE = 1,35$ ) than those who had both their parents from abroad ( $M = 24,75$ ,  $SE = 0,55$ ). In total, students with Greek parents had the lowest scores of all, whereas students with their mother coming from abroad had the highest scores of all.

Table 2a shows the effect of origin on children's social awareness (which was calculated as the sum of the five corresponding sentences concerning social awareness). It seems that among all the possible combinations, what is statistically significant on a child's social awareness is his/her parents' origin, as  $F(1,998) = 8,312$ ,  $p = 0.004 < \alpha$ .

**Table 2a:** Effect of parents' origin on children's social awareness

|                                      | Type III Sum of Squares | df   | Mean Square | F       | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------|---------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model                      | 259.920                 | 7    | 37.131      | 1.466   | .176 | .010                |
| Intercept                            | 21676.120               | 1    | 21676.120   | 855.803 | .000 | .462                |
| Father's origin *<br>Mother's origin | 210.518                 | 1    | 210.518     | 8.312   | .004 | .008                |
| Error                                | 25277.746               | 998  | 25.328      |         |      |                     |
| Total                                | 438648.000              | 1006 |             |         |      |                     |
| Corrected Total                      | 25537.666               | 1005 |             |         |      |                     |

The overview of the combining groups' means gives more details on the direction of their differences. Table 2b shows the effect of parents' origin on children's answers concerning the domain of social awareness.

**Table 2b:** Analysis of the effect of parents' origin on children's social awareness

| Father's origin | Mother's origin | Mean   | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                 |                 |        |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Greece          | Greece          | 17.307 | 1.455      | 14.451                  | 20.163      |
|                 | Other country   | 22.307 | 1.305      | 19.746                  | 24.867      |
| Other country   | Greece          | 22.474 | 1.840      | 18.864                  | 26.084      |
|                 | Other country   | 19.440 | .749       | 17.969                  | 20.910      |

Again, students with both their parents Greek had lower scores ( $M = 17,30$ ,  $SE = 1,46$ ) than those, whose father is Greek and mother from another country ( $M = 22,30$ ,  $SE = 1,31$ ). On the other hand, students who had both their parents from another country had lower scores ( $M = 19,44$ ,  $SE = 0,75$ ) than those whose father was Greek and mother from another country ( $M = 22,47$ ,  $SE = 1,84$ ). In total, students with Greek parents had the lowest scores of all, whereas children whose mother comes from another country had the highest scores.

Finally, despite the fact that the effect of origin on self-regulation, relationship management and decision making was not found to be statistically significant, it seems that there is a strong effect on students' total SEC. Table 3a shows the effect of origin on the whole SEC, which was calculated as the sum of the 25 corresponding sentences.

**Table 3a: Effect of parents' origin on children's total SEC**

|  | Type III Sum of Squares | df   | Mean Square | F        | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|--|-------------------------|------|-------------|----------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model  | 1835.938                | 7    | 262.277     | .918     | .492 | .006                |
| Intercept  | 645262.023              | 1    | 645262.023  | 2258.117 | .000 | .693                |
| Child's origin *<br>Father's origin *<br>Mother's origin | 1168.143                | 1    | 1168.143    | 4.088    | .043 | .004                |
| Error  | 285180.698              | 998  | 285.752     |          |      |                     |
| Total  | 12629606.000            | 1006 |             |          |      |                     |
| Corrected Total  | 287016.636              | 1005 |             |          |      |                     |

It seems that children's total SEC is affected by both their and their parents' origin., as  $F(1, 998) = 4,088$ ,  $p = 0,043 < \alpha$ . The overview of the combining groups' means gives more details on the direction of their differences. Table 3b shows the effect of parents' origin on children's answers concerning their total SEC.

As we can see, students that come from abroad and have Greek parents had the lowest scores ( $M = 99,00$ ,  $SE = 9,76$ ), while students who were born in another

country and have a Greek father and mother from abroad gave the highest scores ( $M = 123,50$ ,  $SE = 8,45$ ). Greek students' answers seem to have not many declinations, independently of their parents' origin. However, the scores of students from other countries had significant declinations between them: students with Greek parents gave the lowest scores of all ( $M = 99,00$ ,  $SE = 9,76$ ), while students whose whole family comes from abroad had the highest scores ( $M = 104,79$ ,  $SE = 4,52$ ).

**Table 3b:** Analysis of the effect of parents' origin on children's SEC

| Child's origin | Father's origin | Mother's origin | Mean    | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                |                 |                 |         |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Greece         | Greece          | Greece          | 110.861 | .582       | 109.719                 | 112.004     |
|                |                 | Other country   | 109.792 | 2.322      | 105.236                 | 114.349     |
|                | Other           | Greece          | 112.310 | 3.139      | 106.150                 | 118.470     |
|                |                 | Other country   | 110.379 | 2.220      | 106.024                 | 114.735     |
| Other          | Greece          | Greece          | 99.000  | 9.760      | 79.848                  | 118.152     |
|                |                 | Other country   | 123.500 | 8.452      | 106.914                 | 140.086     |
|                | Other           | Greece          | 119.000 | 11.953     | 95.544                  | 142.456     |
|                |                 | Other country   | 104.786 | 4.518      | 95.920                  | 113.651     |

## Conclusions

Origin was found to have a significant effect on childrens' social-emotional competence. The domains that are affected are self-awareness, social awareness, as well as the total SEC. All the analysis done showed that children whose parents come from Greece gave the lowest scores.

More especially, concerning students' self-awareness, it highly increases in case the mother comes from abroad. The positive effect of origin on SEC confirmed Feldman's research (2011), which showed the same thing. The acquisition of a cultural and racial identity strengthens the child's self-awareness, as they teach him/her who he is, where he/she comes from, how he/she thinks, feels or reacts. As Charlton (2018) mentions, a permanent residence in a foreign country makes the person better acquainted with him/herself as he/she enters the process of combating the cultural differences he/she finds in the new location. This process helps it stabilize the values and rules that define it, thereby enhancing its self-awareness.

Children's social awareness seems to develop, in case their father or mother comes from another country. This fact can also be explained by the positive effect meeting with other cultures has on the person. People who come from another

country both have their own cultural and racial identity, and, also, meet the dominant culture, from which they adopt elements, too. In that way, they develop a broader understanding of the world and diversity. According to Hajo (2018), the more a person lives in another country, the more he/she learns him/herself, those around him/her and makes more responsible decisions. That is why children living in a country other than their own are more open to new experiences and cultures, more responsive to change and have more developed communication and cooperation skills (Charlton, 2018), features directly linked to the social-emotional competence of the individual.

In general, it is clear that the presence of a different cultural identity within the family has a positive effect on the socio-emotional competence of the child. The different cultural experiences and values that this diversity brings enriches the background that the child brings to school. At the same time, the effort of a parent and / or child from another country to adapt to the dominant culture, while maintaining his/her individual cultural identity, seems to enhance self-image and self-awareness and teaches the child the need for respect and acceptance diversity, skills directly linked to socio-emotional competence. The maternal origin, especially from abroad, has been the most major factor for increased socio-emotional competence. This seems logical, given the mother's serious role in the treatment and multi-faceted development of the child (Bertrand, 1926/2010).

In conclusion, SEC seems to be a set of skills which is very useful to modern citizens. The ability to understand personal thoughts and feelings, their effective management, even in stressful situations or situations of intense fluctuation, empathy, the creation of good interpersonal relationships and responsible decision making are skills, attitudes and values that are necessary for the individual, in order to acquire the ability to understand, manage and express the social and emotional aspects of his/her life (Talvio et al., 2016).

This creates a great responsibility in every educational system to place great emphasis on the social and emotional development of students. Psycho-emotional and social education should be a pillar for modern schools and be applied not only through the cognitive subjects but also independently of them. Since culture has a positive effect on socio-emotional competence and the existence of cultural diversity contributes to its growth, the solution to the serious issue of inequality is opening up to diversity. Diversity is beneficial to the individual, because he thus more easily develops the skills associated with his socio-emotional competence. Keeping it high, it becomes easier to mitigate any inequalities. Intercultural education is the "key" for children's social and emotional development that will gradually transform them into the ideal citizens of the modern world. Education about the harmonic coexistence of people who are in any way differentiated should be the new goal of societies if our purpose is to create a world inspired by the principles of equality, justice, freedom etc.

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