EMOTIONAL AWARENESS OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS ANALYSIS OF NEEDS AND INTERVENTION PROPOSALS

Gemma Filella[1], Felicidad Barreiro[2], Jon Berastegui[3], Maria José Méndez[2], María Priego-Ojeda[1], & Agnès Ros-Morente[1]
[1]Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work, University of Lleida (Spain)
[2]Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain)
[3]Faculty of Psychology, University of Basque Country (Spain)

Abstract

The ability to master emotional vocabulary is evidenced to enhance emotional expression, as well as broaden knowledge of the world and facilitate interpersonal relationships. Also, it helps to develop critical thinking, promotes abstraction, deepens self-knowledge, emotional regulation, forge solid social relationships and improves emotional competencies: emotional awareness, emotional regulation, emotional autonomy, social competence and competences for life and well-being. Some of them are mediated by language, such as emotional awareness which is the first step towards becoming aware of one's own emotions and the emotions of others as well as capturing the emotional climate of a particular context.

This study aims to be a needs analysis to detect the level of emotional vocabulary that primary students know differentiating between positive, negative and ambiguous emotions. Consequently, the differences between gender and grades had been explored. The sample of this study was constituted of 551 primary students (335 boys and 216 girls). An instrument developed *ad-hoc* was implemented to measure the emotional vocabulary. A quantitative analysis was done with the program IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0 software.

The results showed that as participants' ages increased, more positive emotions were detected. Apart from that, a greater number of negative and ambiguous emotions were noticed in the older participants. On the other hand, the younger participants reported an increased number of positive words. As compared to the boys, the girls reported more positive words. To explain these results, a variety of explanations and arguments could be considered.

According to previous research, studies have demonstrated how relevant is to carry out emotional competence's programmes based in emotional education in primary schools at early ages, since then exists major flexibility and capacity to acquire emotional vocabulary. These interventions also prevent bullying and aid in conflict resolution, in addition to improving emotional vocabulary.

Keywords: Anger, sadness, primary education, age, emotional vocabulary.

1. Introduction

Communication is a basic tool for adaptation in the cognitive, social and emotional spheres (Bisquerra and Filella, 2018; Filella, 2014). Communicating therefore involves expressing and using concepts, commonly expressed through words. In this sense, the term vocabulary is used when referring to the set of words in a language that are used to communicate (Martín, 2009; Larraín, Strasser and Lissi, 2012; Bisquerra et al., 2018). The constructivist perspective emphasizes the importance of constructing knowledge with meaning (Díez, 2003). Therefore, increasing vocabulary contributes to the construction of reality, developing critical thinking and fostering abstraction (Bárcena and Read, 2003). Therefore, the emotional vocabulary increases the individual's emotional world and its correct interpretation (Bisquerra, 2000).

Our emotions constitute a triple response, since they include neurophysiological, behavioral and cognitive aspects (Lang, 1971). Beyond this, from the perspective of psychology, there is a relationship between the ability to recognize and communicate emotions with the main models of Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1985; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). From the Emotional Intelligence (EI) perspective (Goleman, 1985; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Bisquerra and Pérez, 2007), all

opinions converge on the importance and necessity of the development of emotional competences, due to their immediate educational applications (Bisquerra et al., 2007), and therefore, of the promotion of emotional vocabulary.

Other studies (Baron-Cohen et al., 2010) commented that the early years are key for emotional development. The authors noted that, between the ages of 4 and 11, emotional vocabulary develops significantly every two years, doubling in volume. From the age of 12, however, it stabilizes and little change is noticeable, although there is still potential for some change (Baron-Cohen et al., 2010). The better senders and receivers we are, the more socially adept we are (Cruz et al., 2013).

A person who is able to name the emotion they are feeling through a word is able to regulate their emotions more effectively (Cervantes and Gaeta, 2017). Being equipped with good emotional competences allows children to identify and define what they are feeling and to act more effectively in response to it (Bisquerra et al., 2007). In another study, Chaplin and Aldao (2013) convey that in order to improve awareness of one's own emotions and the emotions of others, one needs to possess a broad and elaborate emotional vocabulary that allows one to describe precisely what emotion one is feeling. Emotion processing can be significantly influenced by language as soon as children learn to use words and verbal labels for the expression and categorization of emotions (Herbert et al., 2018). Reading has also been shown to be closely related to increased emotional vocabulary and increased levels of empathy (Dylman, Blomqvist and Champoux-Larsson, 2020). Because of this bidirectional link between emotion and language, it is essential to acquire a good emotional vocabulary from an early age.

This study aims to be a needs analysis to detect the level of emotional vocabulary that primary students know differentiating between positive, negative and ambiguous emotions. Consequently, the differences between gender and grades had been explored.

2. Design

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 551 participants, from 4 schools in the region of Lleida, aged between 6 and 12 years (M= 9.23, SD= 1.83), all of them primary school pupils. There were in total 335 boys and 216 girls.

2.2. Instruments

Ad hoc instrument consisting of asking the participants to write down on a piece of paper all the emotions they remembered during a time interval of 3 minutes.

2.3. Procedure

Permission was requested and granted from the Department of Education in order to distribute the vocabulary test. In addition, all families were informed about the content of the study and its purpose. All pupils participated on a voluntary basis, as did the schools.

3. Results

Table 1. Emotion vocabulary and age.

Age	Positive		Negative		Ambiguous	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
6 (n=45)	1.38	0.91	1.38	1.25	0.02	0.15
7 (n= 67)	2.09	1.04	2.57	1.43	0.12	0.33
8 (n = 93)	2.26	1.17	2.74	1.66	0.15	0.36
9 (n= 93)	2.70	1.13	3.53	1.63	0.20	0.41
10 (n= 97)	2.85	1.34	3.52	1.98	0.18	0.38
11 (n= 79)	3.46	1.62	3.48	1.80	0.14	0.35
12 (n= 77)	3.40	1.49	4.16	1.93	0.40	0.49

The first purpose is to study whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of positive emotions and age. The results of the ANOVA test show that age has an influence on the number of positive emotions (F= 20.905, p< 0.01). The second purpose is to study whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of negative emotions and age. The results of the ANOVA test show that age has an influence on the number of negative emotions (F= 16.389, p< 0.01). The third purpose is to study whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of ambiguous emotions and age. The results of the ANOVA test show that age influences the number of ambiguous emotions (F= 6.408, p< 0.01).

Finally, statistically significant differences between boys and girls in the number of positive, negative and ambiguous emotions were explored using the student's t-test. The results show that there are significant differences between boys and girls in the number of positive emotions, t (498) = -3.624, p< .05, and negative emotions, t (498) =-3.133, p< .001. In contrast, there are no significant differences in gender and ambiguous emotions.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the differences between the emotional vocabulary of boys and girls between 6 and 12 years of age. Specifically, it was studied whether there were differences according to age and gender.

The results obtained showed that the number of positive emotions increased with increasing age, even more than doubling its initial volume. It is evident that the emotional vocabulary of pupils between 6 and 12 years of age is more than double its initial volume. Although the greatest difference is found between the beginning and the end of the initial cycle (between 6 and 8 years old), between 6 and the ages corresponding to the middle and upper cycle (9-12 years old) and between the ages of the middle cycle (8 and 9 years old) and the ages corresponding to the upper cycle (11 and 12 years old).

These results are congruent with the affirmation of previous studies, such as that of Baron-Cohen, Golan, Wheelwright, Granader and Hill (2010) on the importance of starting the process of acquiring emotional vocabulary at an early age, since in these early stages there is greater flexibility and capacity for acquiring emotional vocabulary. Furthermore, a sufficiently broad acquisition of emotional vocabulary is related to the emotional educational process, which will favor the pupil's overall development (Bisquerra et al., 2007).

The data obtained also showed that the older the age, the greater the number of ambiguous words. This can be explained by the fact that, as previous studies have shown, the acquisition of ambivalent concepts and complex vocabulary increases significantly with age. That is, the older the age, the higher the level of abstraction, and therefore the higher the number of ambiguous words (Lund, Sidhu and Pexman, 2019).

In reference to the gender variable, the results showed a higher number of negative words reported by boys while girls showed, in general, a higher number of positive emotion-words. Although there is no scientific agreement on the existing differences between boys and girls, some studies in adults have shown that the male gender manifests a higher level of self-control and employs the suppression strategy more frequently (Gross, 2019), while the female gender tends to express their emotions more (Goldshmit and Weller, 2000).

In conclusion, for the present study it was hypothesized that there were differences in emotional vocabulary as a function of students' age and gender. The results showed an increase in the number of positive emotions with increasing age, doubling their initial volume, an increase in negative and ambiguous emotions with increasing age, and a higher number of positive words reported by girls. These results give us an idea of our sample to therefore apply our emotional education program, to increase emotional competences through language and emotional awareness and regulation using the video game Happy 8-12. The videogame consists on resolving a group of 25 conflicts that occur in common contexts for children, such as at school, at home or in the park. the video game aims to improve the emotional competences encompassed in Bisquerra's theoretical framework: awareness, regulation, autonomy, social competences and life competences; providing children with a better understanding of their emotions and how to deal with them and their conflicts in everyday life.

Looking to the near future, we hope that the intervention with the Happy project will help us to improve the emotional competences of the pupils and that this baseline will form the foundation of the program for the improvement of emotional awareness and regulation through language.

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