**FACTORS AFFECTING THE SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE OF STUDENTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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Received: 06/01/2022

Reviewed: 13/01/2022

Revised: 15/01/2022

Accepted: 18/01/2022

Released: 25/01/2022

*In psychology, social intelligence is a new research sector on human intelligence. The article studies the factors affecting the social intelligence of students of Early Childhood Education. The research results contribute to clarifying the theory of social intelligence, as a basis for studying the practice of social intelligence of students of Early Childhood Education.*

**Key words:** social intelligence; students of Early Childhood Education; factors.

**1. Introduction**

Generally understanding, social intelligence (SI) is the ability to complete tasks in the context of interacting with others. It is related to social awareness and the ability to intelligently solve problems in communication activities or interactions with others. People with social intelligence have the ability to use the full power of their brains and body language to communicate and understand other people's body language, making people feel comfortable when interacting with them. The study of social intelligence and its relationship with success in a person's career and life is a new research direction that is of great interest to scientists around the world. In particular, finding out the influencing factors not only clarify the theory of social intelligence, but also helps scientists find ways to improve the social intelligence index (SI) for the students of Early Childhood Education (ECE).

**2. Research overview**

E.L. Thorndike (1874 - 1949) was the first researcher to introduce the concept of "social intelligence" in 1920 in the article "Intelligence and its use" published in Harper's Magazine. E.L. Thorndike represents a research direction that considers social intelligence as human perception and behavior.

E.L. Thorndike emphasizes that intelligence types are totally different, and it is necessary to expand the concept of IQ becaus “*No one is good at everything. Wisdom changes according to the situation in life*” [4]. In fact, there are cases in which “A person who is less intelligent in most respects, sometimes confined to a mental hospital, is playing the first-rate game of chess. A man who is nationally famous as an editor, speaker and executive director, failed to pass his math exam as a freshman” [4]. Thorndike's approach to developing multiple intelligences created a controversy with that of Spearman for 25 years (1920-1945) (Spearman proposed the single-mind theory).

According to E.L. Thorndike, social intelligence is (1) *the capacity* to understand and manage people and (2) *the capacity* to behave wisely in person-to-person relationships. The view that social intelligence is a combination of these competencies was agreed upon and inherited by many later psychologists when studying social intelligence.

In Vietnam, in 2011, Khanh, Nguyen Cong researched on social intelligence in the research "Research on spiritual quotation (SQ) of students at Hanoi National University of Education". The authors have built a test to measure the SQ of students at the University of Pedagogy, meeting the design and measurement standards. According to the research results, about 20-25% of studied students have low SQ (<90 points); meanwhile, students of the University of Education are better in the groups of competencies including social awareness, problem solving in social interactions and weaker in the groups of competences including development and maintenance of social relations and adaptive capacity. The factors affecting spiritual quotation are student’s majors, gender, ethnicity (historical - cultural - social conditions) [1].

In 2011, the author Son, Huynh Van and his colleagues studied the topic "Parents' awareness of social intelligence and measures fore parents to develop social intelligence for children aged 6-11 years old in Ho Chi Minh City". Research results from 400 parents show that parents have a low awareness of the development of social intelligence of children at the age of 6-11. The research also shows that there are a number of factors affecting the development of social intelligence of children aged from 6 to 11 years old including physical and biological conditions, the surrounding world, adult’s education, peer group communication and learning activities [2].

In 2017, Tra, Kieu Thi Thanh studied the topic "Social intelligence characteristics of students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education". The author has studied social intelligence characteristics of 866 students based on the S.P.A.C.E model (Social Perception, Self-Expression, Credibility, Effective Communication and Empathy) proposed by K. Albrecht. It can be seen from the results that the level of students’ social intelligence is at an average one. The author points out the basic factors affecting students’ social intelligence at University of Education including biological factors; personal positivity, family, friends, learning environment and some other social factors [4].

Thus, there are very few studies on social intelligence in our country. The issues of theory, reality and application of social media have not been interested much. There are the research by Khanh, Nguyen Cong studying the theory of social intelligence, two practical studies by Son, Huynh Van clarifying the awareness of social intelligence, and the research of Tra, Kieu Thi Thanh studying the characteristics of social intelligence of ECE students in Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, the research on the influencing factors will contribute to clarifying the theory of social intelligence in general and the directions of impact on improving the spiritual quotation from the perspective of psychology.

**3. Research approach and methods**

***3.1. Research approach***

- Operational principle: Social intelligence of ECE students is formed during their participation in social activities, subject to the interaction of the environment with historical social identity. When assessing students' social intelligence, it is necessary to consider the mutual influences between activities of preschool students and their living, learning and training environments.

- Systemic principle: Students’ social intelligence is considered as a psychological structure consisting of many components that make up a combination in a complete structural system of personality of ECE students. The social intelligence of ECE students is under the influence of a system of interrelated criteria which can be measured by a system of appropriate methods and scales. Social intelligence of ECE students is influenced by a system of objective, subjective and interrelated factors. If a system of appropriate pedagogical psychological measures can be pointed out, the solutions to training and developing social intelligence of ECE students in their learning and future professional activities can be proposed.

- Development principles: Social intelligence of ECE students is formed, developed and changed in accordance with the development of their personality through different stages of the student's age. It is the result of the process of interacting with real life. Social intelligence is not innate and can be significantly changed and developed. On assessing the social intelligence of ECE students, it is necessary to consider the process of acquiring knowledge in their school, the age-psychological characteristics, and the personality development of the children. The specific competencies for social intelligence must develop along with the life experience, experience accumulation process and age of ECE students.

***3.2. Research methods***

- Methods of studying documents are applied to systematize and clarify trends and views of domestic and foreign authors on issues related to social intelligence of ECE students, clarify key objective and subjective factors affecting the social intelligence of ECE students.

- Observational method is used to collect information about the influencing factors and the level of social intelligence of ECE students in the process of activities and communication. Specifically, This method is applied to observe the attitudes, communication methods, and problem solving of ECE students in their interactions at the university.

**4. Research results**

***4.1. Social intelligence***

*Social intelligence is a complex capacity that includes social awareness, the ability to establish and maintain social relationships, the integration ability, the ability to adapt to activities in the social environment, and problem solving in social interaction with other people/groups of people.*

From the above concept, it can be seen that:

(1) Social intelligence is a complex capacity, a flexible and organized combination of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

(2) Social intelligence includes 5 component competencies: social awareness, social relationship establishment and maintenance, integration, adaptation, and problem solving in social interaction.

(3) The competencies in social intelligence have a close relationship with each other.

On studying the factors affecting the social intelligence of ECE students, we found that there are 2 groups of factors: subjective factors and objective factors.

***4.2. Subjective factors***

*4.2.1. Artistic qualities*

Kindergarten teacher is a special profession. The teacher is both a mother, a teacher, a "doctor", an "artist"... and a friend of the child. Indeed, if a person wants to become a good preschool teacher who is popular with the children, it is neccessary for the teacher to improve their abilities and qualities, including those related to the arts. Specifically, preschool teachers must participate in guiding children in activities such as *dancing, singing, playing, drawing, molding, tearing and pasting, coloring, reading poetry, telling stories, decorating classrooms, making toys...* Therefore, in the training program, ECE students are trained in music, fine arts, physical training and sports, storytelling, and dancing through subjects such as: Singing, Organ, Methods of organizing musical activities for children. Preschool children, Methods of organizing visual activities for preschool children, Dance and choreographer, Storytelling and reading poetry, Instructions in making toys, Basic music, Basic art... These teaching contents are intended to provide students with a wealth of knowledge and skills related to art subjects, helping students have a good artistic foundation for future work. However, to do well in these subjects, students need to have artistic qualities. The reality of training has proven that students who have artistic qualities will learn faster and more effectively than the rest. In preschools, teachers who are more competent in art activities are more likely to participate in group activities, to be closer to children, to be able to detect and nurture more gifted children, and to be more admired and loved by children.

In the enrollment of ECE students, pedagogical universities often put the gifted subject as one of the three subjects in the entrance exams (the remaining subjects are Math - Literature, or Literature - English....). In the training program, most of the subjects are related to arts. Therefore, artistic qualities is an advantage for students to study better, helping them to be more confident in learning and collective activities. However, the requirements for art subjects are only at the basic level, which leads to the situation that students without artistic qualities can still study well if they study hard with good learning methods.

*4.2.2. Life experiences*

Life experience has a certain influence on the social intelligence of ECE students. During their time at high school and living with their families in the locality, they also have a certain amount of life experience. After entering the university, most of the students do not live with their families. When they live and study in a larger environment, they are required to be more independent, self-reliant and make more efforts. Students who have more experiences in life and social relationships, are better oriented by family and school in learning about the world, the people around them in general; and in preschool education, preschool children, preschool activities... in particular will have good social knowledge, especially knowledge about pedagogy, preschool teacher profession; can adapt more quickly to social relationships, especially relationships with friends, teachers, and relationships with preschool children and their parents. Accordingly, their experiences and ability to handle pedagogical situations are also richer and more effective.

*4.2.3. Love for children*

Love for children is the basic quality of a preschool teacher. Therefore, in pedagogical schools, this quality of ECE students is focused to improve right from the first year. If students love their job, they will be enthusiastic about studying hard in order to achieve the best results in learning and training. If students love children, students will always feel happy and friendly when they are with preschool children, always take care and educate children in the best way, as well as give appropriate and effective behaviors when communicating with children and their parents. These two qualities are inextricably linked. If they have a love for children, ECE students will easily adapt and integrate into the preschool education environment at the pedagogical university, into pedagogical internships and their future jobs.

*4.2.4. Activeness*

ECE students’ activeness has an influence on their social intelligence. When students themselves actively participate in activities and practice during their study at a pedagogical school, it will foster their love for and close relationship with teachers, friends, preschool children or parents. The activeness also helps them increase their own experience and understanding; easily integrate and adapt to the preschool education environment. Students’ activeness in self-training is an important factor to improve the spiritual quotation for ECE students. Within the scope of this article, we limit the activeness of ECE students to Learning activities, regular pedagogical training activities, practical activities, pedagogical practice, and other collective activities in the pedagogical school.

***4.3. Objective factors***

*4.3.1. Factors related to the university*

This is a group of factors that have an influence on the social intelligence of ECE students. The factors related to the university will make differences in the learning activities of ECE students compared to students of other faculties, contributing to the formation of characteristics in vocational training. These factors include:

- Content and training program: The goal of preschool education is to develop children’s physical, cognitive, language, emotional - social, and aesthetic qualities, forming the first elements of personality for children to be ready to enter primary school. Based on this goal, preschool education institutions can design reasonable training contents and programs to meet output standards, and form the qualities and competencies of preschool teachers. The content that students learn in the training program has a significant influence on their social intelligence. The school not only equips students with understanding but also forms in them pedagogical skills and professional habits. In the training program, the university focuses on providing learners with a volume of theoretical knowledge combined with practice, divided equally among groups such as knowledge of physical education, cognition, language, and aesthetics ... of preschool children.

- The university’s lecturers also has an influence on the social intelligence of ECE students. On studying and practicing at the university, students are not only imparted knowledge by their teachers, but also greatly influenced by them. The pedagogical environment requires teachers to always be exemplary in their style, behavior, and pedagogical capacity, to improve their professional qualifications, improve their teaching methods, and enhance their reputation. In addition, ECE students are greatly influenced by preschool teachers in internships. Thus, thanks to the teaching faculty and the preschool teacher's practical guidance, students will acquire a system of basic knowledge about the profession of a preschool teacher, be able to effectively deal with pedagogical situations, and quickly adapt and integrate into the preschool education environment.

- Collective activities at school: ECE students often participate in collective activities, exchange activities such as cultural activities, sports, practical activities, picnics, volunteering… These activities are organized by the Youth Union, the Student Union, and the faculty and university clubs. On participating in group activities, students will have many opportunities to expand their social relationships with friends, teachers at the university or other individuals/groups of people. Regular and continuous participation helps them maintain those social relationships. Collective activities have a certain influence on the adaptation and integration of students in groups or collectives. Communication skills and problem solving skills learned in collective activities also contribute significantly to the formation of competencies related to social intelligence of ECE students.

*4.3.2. Living environment and cultural factors*

The living environment and cultural factors in the student’s residence have a certain influence on their social intelligence.

*Living environment*

A favorable living environment with friendly residents help students become more confident in their interaction with people. This will be a favorable condition for each student to be able to better adapt and integrate into the new environment, establish and maintain social relationships. Therefore, in order to improve student’s social intelligence, it is necessary to pay attention to the impact of living environment factors.

*Cultural factors*

Each student comes from different regions with specific regional characteristics. The difference in geographical, economic and cultural conditions of students from different regions has made their daily behavior different from the others.

Thus, subjective and objective factors all have the influences on ECE student’s social intelligence and they are interrelated with each other. Therefore, in order to develop ECE student’s social intelligence, it is essential to pay attention to the impacts of these factors.

**5. Discussion**

The research results in this article inherit the point of view of E.L. Thorndike in which social intelligence is considered as human perception and behavior. The author also agrees that types of intelligence are totally different and the concept of IQ should be understood in a large point of view. Therefore, from the point of view of C.E. Spearman (1920 - 1945) with the single-intellectual theory, how will the factors affecting social intelligence be studied?

**6. Conclusion**

Currently in Vietnam, social intelligence is a new issue with a modest number of researches. The factors affecting social intelligence of ECE students need to be researched and clarified in both theory and practice because they will be the ones who directly interact with preschool children in the future, and have a great influence on the children. For preschool teachers, pedagogical skills are a prerequisite while the foundation for the formation of pedagogical skills is the competencies of social intelligence. Only by researching on social intelligence, the factors affecting social intelligence of ECE students are solutions to improve student’s social intelligence index found out. It can be seen from research results that group of subjective factors such as artistic qualities, life experience, passion for work, love for children, activeness; and group of objective factors such as factors related to the university (content, training program, lecturers, collective activities), living environment, cultural factors... have an influence on social intelligence of ECE students.

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