THE EFFECT OF THE NONVERBAL DECODING ABILITY OF EMOTIONS FROM FASCIAL EXPRESSIONS, INTONATION AND BODY ON STUDENTS' SOCIO-SCHOOL COMPETENCIES

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to examine whether the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and the body has an effect on students' socio-school competencies, and whether there is an impact of psychostimulation through extracurricular activities on the manifestation of higher social competencies and nonverbal emotional receptive manifestations. The study sample consisted of 96 subjects (N=52 girls and N=45 boys). The effect of psychostimulation on the criterion variable was tested through experimental design, with three groups; one experimental group (exposure to psychostimulant treatment) and two control groups. Nonverbal emotional receptive manifestations were measured through the Test for Nonverbal Emotional Receptive Manifestation (DANVA). Socio-school competencies were measured through the Socio-School Competence Scale (SHKSSH). The research results emphasize that the ability to decode nonverbal emotions from fascial expressions, intonation and body tone are not the same in pre- and post-testing, where an important relationship is seen only in the post-testing phase, specifically between socio-school competence and the ability to decode nonverbal emotions from fascial and bodily expressions. In this context, at the same time, regression analysis did not support the assertion that focused on the contribution of the ability to decode nonverbal emotions through its expressive channels and socio-school competence.

Keywords: Ability for emotional decoding, socio-school competencies, fascial emotional decoding, bodily and intonational emotional decoding.

1. Introduction

Emotion is defined as a feeling or affective state that appears when people are in a situation or interaction perceived as important to them, especially when the same situation affects their well-being. In other words, emotions are a form through which people communicate with the world around them (Santrock, 2011). Another conceptualization defines emotions as physiological, behavioral, and communicative responses to environmental stimuli, which are processed at a cognitive level while experienced as emotional (Planlap et al., 2006).

Social competence is defined as the ability to manage and regulate social interactions effectively. In other words, an individual who possesses social competence has positive relationships with others, the ability to create and maintain relationships, as well as the capacity to respond appropriately to social situations (Peezada, Nusrat Bashir & Najmah, 2022)

Identifying and understanding the complex relationship between emotional competence and social development is essential for stimulating healthier socio-emotional development, as this development further contributes to the well-being and overall social adaptation of children (López-Hernández et al., 2021). Considering the wide range of research dedicated to children's emotional development, it has been identified that the development of emotional competence, more specifically the ability to recognize, communicate, and regulate emotional experiences, is defined as a key factor in children's socio-emotional adjustment (Suveg et al., 2008).

From an existing consensus, it is emphasized that the development of emotional competence is determined both by the child's temperament and their socio-emotional experiences (Lewis, 2014). As an example, we can take infants who may be a bit more irritable than others, where if the parents of the same children can respond to this challenge by offering sensitive and

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attentive care, it will enable the formation of a secure bond. A secure bond enables children in the future to regulate and manage their emotions (Cooke et al., 2019).

1.1.Nonverbal emotional communication channels

Emotional communication refers to the possibility of using messages, thus enabling the exchange of information about each other's emotional state, as well as influencing them. At their manifestation moments, emotions can be presented in the form of direct verbal/nonverbal expressions (p.sh., after a smile it is said that happiness is experienced), but often, they can also be complex and difficult to grasp. The function of messages received from emotions can perform two different functions: 1. enable the sharing of information; 2. influence the emotions of others (for example., through warnings and advertisements) (Harry T. Reis & Susan Sprecher, 2016). The process of communicating emotions involves communicating the circumstances, reflections, and feelings related to an emotional event. This process begins at the moment the emotional episode is experienced, depending on the frequency and duration of the event. And what is more important in this context is the fact that sharing emotions serves for interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits, enabling the experience of inner satisfaction and relief after communicating emotions (Rime, 2007). These communications or emotional divisions also prove to be important for improving and maintaining social relationships (Owen Hargie, 2011).
Starting from the assumption that a person cannot not communicate at all (Watzlawick et al., 1967), and that all movements are to some extent expressive, they can be called nonverbal behavior and communication. This form of communication is defined as that aspect of communication which is not expressed in words (Wiener et al., 1972). Under this umbrella, nonverbal emotional communication takes part through fascial, intonational, and bodily experience.

1.2.Emotion recognition grom fascial expression

The ability to recognize and interpret emotions through facial expressions is an important component of nonverbal communication, being labeled as one of the key skills that contributes to maintaining and developing interpersonal relationships (Mancini et al., 2013). Facial expression refers to facial behavior that suggests an emotional meaning to an outside observer, implying that this form of manifestation functions to convey a specific meaning, suggesting that something independent of that behavior exists (for example, an internal sensation) (Nico H. Frijda & Anna Tcherkassof, 1997)
Experimental studies argue that people actively explore fascial expressions, with a tendency to recognize emotions. In this case, perception and manifest emotion interact, with studies confirming that this interaction is very rapid, and that emotional reactions from looking at fascial expressions can be used to judge the emotion displayed on the face (Adolphs, 2006). The importance of decoding nonverbal emotional signals becomes evident from the early social interactions of the infant (Garvey, A., & Fogel, A., 2007), however, the most accurate interpretation of emotions appears between the ages of three and six (Boyatzis et al., 1993).
Neurodevelopmental studies propose specific brain seasons involved in processing facial expressions, continuing their structural development during late childhood and adolescence (Kanwisher et al., 1997), suggesting that the ability to decode fascial nonverbal signals can reach maturity by adulthood (Montirosso et al., 2010).

1.3.Emotion recognition from the voice

Speaking is the most important means of communication, where the human voice is a biometric feature, just like the fingerprint, and this feature itself reflects the emotional state of the speaker. Therefore, we can say that data obtained from direct conversations, or through transmitted voice, can contain more realistic emotional characteristics than textual data (Cevahir Parlak & Banu Diri, 2013).

People use their voice to communicate not only verbally but also emotionally and nonverbally. The sound produced by speech can be traced throughout its entire pathway, from the outer, middle, and inner ear to the auditory areas of the brain. Intonational emotional information reaches the primary auditory cortex, the secondary auditory cortex (Schirmer, A., & Adolphs, R, 2017) as well as in the amygdala (Fecteau et al., 2007). In this journey of processing emotional vocalisms, mirror neurons also play an important role, as argued by a study which suggested an increased skin conduction response when listening to emotions expressed through voice (Ramachandra et al., 2009).

Since enabling voice recording, research on decoding emotions through voice has begun to emerge. Primarily, two main approaches have been used for decoding and emotional classification: the first approach is recorded as a response to the request to listen to sound fragments that further decipher the expressed emotions, while the second approach focuses on the acoustic features of the voice that contain emotional manifestations such as pitch, duration, and voice intensity (Juslin, P.N & Scherer, K.R., 2005). Research of this nature argues that at least basic emotions are well recognized through sound (Banse, R & Scherer, K.R, 1996).

1.4.Emotion recognition from body posture

Tradition has consistently emphasized that the face is considered the primary source for gathering information to recognize emotions (Ekman, P & O'Sullivan, M. , 1988), Although during daily social interaction, in the language of the expression, the body, actions, and bodily interactions also interfere and interact (Straulino et al., 2023).

The literature emphasizes that people show fascinating abilities to draw conclusions about the emotions experienced from face-to-face conversations, and often this conclusion is reached through the analysis of body language (H. Kuehne et al., 2011). For example, touching the nose implies distrust, while holding the head with hands indicates an expression of sadness. From this, we can emphasize that it is a natural human ability that allows one to understand and interpret the meaning of body language (K. Soomro et al., 2012).

1.5.Socio-school competence

Socio-school competencies include the skills, attitudes, and behaviors of students that contribute to academic success, and it should be emphasized that academic achievements are not only included (Elliott, 2002). Research argues that acquired school skills and knowledge are the best predictors of future academic success for students in further education (La Paro, 2000).

Social competence is considered a precursor to the adaptation process (Owens et al., 2013), which is defined as the ability to exhibit learned, acceptable behaviors characterized by positive social interactions (Zelst et al., 2014). Considering the fact that social competence is built on previously acquired skills and knowledge (Snape, D., & Spencer, L., 2003), the same depends on the individual's ability to learn and adapt to new challenging environments (Raven, J., & Stephenson, J. , 2001). Considering the fact that social competence is built through accumulated knowledge and gained experience, it serves as the foundation upon which people's

perceptions of their behavior and their expectations for future relationships are constructed (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007).
The link between social and academic competence is confirmed by existing literature, which argues that the ability to interact effectively with those around you plays a crucial role in the efficient use of one's personal intellectual potential (Davis, 2010). There are three perspectives that explain the relationship between social and school competence, with the first perspective emphasizing that these two competences are directly proportional to each other (Markus et al., 2017), the second perspective emphasizes that social competence maximizes social support for students, which helps improve academic performance (Anme et al., 2015), while the third perspective emphasizes that motivation and a low level of anxiety serve as links between these two competencies (Comedis, 2014). When it comes to school competence, academic performance is a crucial indicator of an individual's knowledge, competencies, and skills knowledgeable in the learning environment, which is often measured through the overall grade point average (FarheenMalik et al., 2025).

2. Methodology

The research objective refers to predication, addressing the affirmative form regarding the existence of the effect of the nonverbal ability to decode emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and the body on students' socio-school competencies.

2.1. Purpose and Hypothesis

The specific research objectives are conceptualized as follows:

P1. To study the effect of the predictor variable: the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and the body over the criterion variable: socio-school competencies.

P2. To examine the relationship between the ability for nonverbal emotional decoding from fascial expressions, intonation, body, and socio-school competencies for the two phases of testing: pretest and posttest.

The following research hypotheses, arising from the stated objectives:

H1. The ability to nonverbally decode emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and body function proves to have a significant effect on students' socio-school competencies.

H2. Increasing the ability to decode nonverbal emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and body is closely linked to socio-school competencies for the two phases of testing: pretest and posttesting.

2.2. Subjects

Out of 96 students, we randomly selected 35 students who were exposed to the effects of psychostimulant activities for 3 weeks.
The probability of remembering photographs, postures, and vocal intonation is relative to the fact that children at school, while reading the internet, moving through settlements and frequented places, are constantly exposed to photographs that carry signals of fascial emotions, body postures, and different vocal intonations, so the possibility of remembering a photograph labeled as an emotion is minimal. Secondly, we have been attentive to the possibility that children's memory appears as a relevant factor. In this context, we have considered that students, after exposure to fascial, intonative stimuli, and postures, should not be shown which photo is associated with which emotion and whether their answers were correct.

3. Results

The main objective of the study focuses on the effect of the nonverbal ability to decode emotions from fascial expressions, intonation, and the body on students' socio-school competencies. Before presenting the results of predictive and regressive analysis, we first introduce the results of the internal consistency of the instruments used to evaluate the variables in question.

3.1.Metric characteristics of the instruments used

Table 1. Reliabilility Statistics for pre-test and post-test.

	The ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions			
	from fascial expression n=24	from the intonation of the voice n=16	from bodily expression n=8	Socio-school competencies n=12
PRETEST	0.845	0.589	0.632	0.356
POSTTEST	0.887	0.622	0.749	0.584

The data presented in Table 1 emphasize that the ability for nonverbal decoding of emotions from fascial expression tends to have a stable internal consistency, both in pretest and posttest, consisting of strong reliability, while the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from voice intonation and body expression shows a tendency to increase internal consistency after psychostimulant intervention, although in both phases internal consistency is acceptable. On the other hand, we can say that the reliability of the socio-school competency test, after psychostimulation intervention, tends to provide more reliable results compared to the results before the intervention.

At the core of the study lies the research question about the relationship between *the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions* and socio-school competence. The correlative analysis and the results of the conducted analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between socio-school competence and the three components of the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions, for the experimental and control group (N=96).

		The ability to nonverbally decode emotions from expressions		
		Fascial	Body	Intonation
Socio-school competencies	Pearson Correlation	0.171	0.117	-0.130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.114	.265	.232

Table 2 shows that the three factors of the ability for nonverbal emotional decoding from fascial, bodily expressions, and intonation do not statistically significantly correlate with the socio-school competence of the students. Correlative analysis was conducted both for the experimental group, which was exposed to the effect of psychostimulation, and for the control group, which was not exposed to the effect of psychostimulation..

Table 3. Correlations between socio-school competence and the three components of the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions, only for the experimental group (N=36).

		The ability to nonverbally decode emotions from expressions		
		Fascial	Body	Intonation
Socio-school competence	Pearson Correlation	.333*	.394*	.073
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.017	.673

Table 3 shows that students' socio-school competencies statistically significantly and positively correlate with their ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from fascial expression ($r=0.333$; $p<0.05$) and from bodily expression ($r=0.394$; $p<0.05$). Correlative analysis was conducted only for the experimental group, which was exposed to the effect of psychostimulation.

Thanks to statistical analysis, we have tested whether the factors: fascial, intonational, and bodily expression have a *statistically significant effect* on the dependent variable in our case socio-school competencies. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The effect of predicate variables on the criterion variable.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1025.370[a]	88	11.652	.374	.989	.804
Intercept	69193.446	1	69193.446	2221.39	.000	.996
Fascial expression	289.265	18	16.070	.516	.884	.537
Expressive intonation	4.558	7	.651	.021	1.000	.018
Bodily expression	195.083	10	19.508	.626	.760	.439
Fascial expression * Expressive intonation	13.279	3	4.426	.142	.932	.050
Fascial expression * Bodily expression	73.628	4	18.407	.591	.679	.228
Expressive intonation * Bodily expression	1.808	1	1.808	.058	.816	.007
Fascial * Intonation * Bodily expression	.000	0	.	.	.	.000
Error	249.190	8	31.149			
Total	114035.804	97				
Corrected Total	1274.559	96				

a. R Squared = .804 (Adjusted R Squared = -1.346)

Based to the statistical analysis, we have tested the magnitude of the effect — that is, the percentage of variance in socio-school competence explained by a specific factor: the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from fascial expression.

The analysis showed that the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions factor from fascial expression does not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable ($F = 0.516$, $p > 0.05$). However, a high value of "Partial eta Squared" ($\eta 2p$ 0.537) was observed, indicating that this factor explains 53.7% of the variance. This mismatch between the low F value and the large effect size suggests that the study suffered from insufficient statistical

strength due to the small sample size, which may have led to an overestimation of the "Partial eta Squared" value.
The two remaining factors: the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from voice expression ($F = 0.021$, $p > 0.05$) and of the body ($F = 0.626$, $p > 0.05$) also have no effect on the dependent variable, meaning they do not have a statistically significant effect on the increase of students' socio-school competencies. Regarding the magnitude of the effect of these two factors, it turns out that the ability to decode emotional expressions from intonational expression has very low effects (η^2_p 0.018), specifically, this factor explains only 1.8% of the variance in socio-school competence. On the other hand, the magnitude of the effect for the third factor—the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from bodily expression on socio-school competence—turns out to be very large (η^{2p} 0.439, or the factor in question manages to explain 43.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, since other sources of variation coming from the other two factors have been taken into account.

4. Discussion

The current study aims to investigate the extent of the effect that the ability to nonverbally decode emotions through channels of fascial expression, voice intonation, and body position has on the criterion, more specifically socio-school competence. In this context, stimuli have been presented through photographs, depicting specific emotions of people's faces and body postures, while simultaneously combining stimuli from speech intonations.
A major part of the research focuses on the context of the relationship between socio-school competencies and the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from the three channels to students. The research concludes that the instruments used possess adequate metric characteristics.
Regarding the achievement of the predictive goal, the study concluded that students' socio-school competencies are statistically significantly and positively linked to the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from fascial and bodily expression only in the experimental group exposed to psychostimulant treatment, and the same results were not verified when tested in both groups: experimental and control. This can be explained through Simpson's paradox, which suggests that a relationship within a subgroup can weaken when analyzed together with several other groups on the fact that different groups may have different characteristics and distribution of results (Kievit et al., 2013). In this context, another possible interpretation of this result could be the inclusion of participants who are exposed for the first time to the environment and new people (the experimental group) on one hand, and participants who are only acquainted with each other and have been stimulated for a certain period through psychostimulant treatment, including interaction among teachers, students, and peers, demonstrating the inclusion of different characteristics and distributions in the research, while also highlighting the importance of socio-emotional learning (Husaj, 2016).
Along these lines, Goodfellow and Nowicki (2010) found that children who had more difficulty identifying emotions from fascial expressions were more likely to manifest problems in peer relationships and in the area of academic achievement. Primarily, they suggest that the ability to nonverbally decode emotions plays an important role in students' positive social and academic relationships (Stephanie Goodfellow & Stephen Nowicki Jr., 2010). Considering that the correlation analyses in our study argued that the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from the sphere of intonation at no stage is significantly linked to social competencies, in this context research was found suggesting the opposite. More specifically, Leppanen and Hietanen (2001), suggest that the ability to recognize emotions from the realm of intonation is linked to children's social adaptation.

The study conducted by Buimer and his collaborators (2025), which focused on analyzing the connection between social competence, the ability to identify emotions from fascial expressions, and the neural processing of the same. They argued that there is no significant relationship between social competence and the ability to identify emotions from fascial expressions, thus contradicting the findings of our research, which emphasize the opposite.
The research emphasizes that the factor: the ability to decode nonverbal emotional expressions from fascial, bodily, and intonational expression does not have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable: socio-school competence. The lack of independent contribution from the three channels for nonverbal decoding of emotions, from fascial, intonation, and bodily expression, which may fall within the field of emotion perception, is realistically not equivalent according to social information processing theory to the ability to present appropriate behavior in social situations, given that the theory in the word emphasizes that social competence requires a more complex process of processing social information, and we cannot focus solely on perceiving nonverbal emotional signals (Nick Crick & Kenneth Dodge, 1994). To contribute, the ability to nonverbally decode emotions from fascial, bodily, and intonative expressions regarding socio-school competence, besides receiving messages or social signals, knowledge must also move into the process of emotional experience and practicing sending emotional messages to the other party (Halberstadt et al., 2002).

4.1.Limitations and practical implications of research

The conclusion drawn from the study's findings highlights an important theoretical and practical difference between the perception (recognition) of emotions and the display of behavior (socio-school competence). The study in question offers a multidisciplinary approach and treatment of the research issue, as it does not rely on a simple search for interconnections between factors but affirms the need for socio-school competence to be studied through multidimensional models, which include cognitive, emotional, environmental, and social factors. The finding clearly shows that complex socio-school constructs cannot be reduced to simple indicators of school, but above all must include cognitive-emotional ones as well. The findings have broad practical implications in school settings by professional school staff. Teachers, psychologists, and sociologists should use emotional decoding skills as an indicator or prerequisite to assess a student's socio-emotional adaptation. The fact that psychostimulation of emotional decoding ability resulted in an increased connection with socio-school competencies makes us optimistic to assume that it will be reflected in a generally better socio-emotional development of the students.
The study in question carries methodological limitations of the instruments; specifically, the emotion decoding tests used in the study employ static images and isolated audio recordings under environmental conditions in which the psychostimulation occurred (detached from context). In real life, decoding occurs in a fraction of a second, in a dynamic and stressful environment, which this conclusion and these tests may not have adequately reflected decoding ability. However, psychostimulation of the emotional decoding ability through specific activities indicates that this "missing decoding ability" before psychostimulation (recorded through photos with static expressions), after psychostimulation (through representational models – students executing different emotions while students must name and distinguish them as such) indicates that students are capable of generalizing this ability even over photos with static emotional expressions – so although this limitation was expressed by us, we still hold the opinion that it should be taken with caution. Another limitation relates to the sample and developmental period of the students involved in the study. The limitation may lie in the specific nature of the study participants, as they are all students aged 10-11 years old. The

importance of decoding may vary depending on the age of the participants, so there remains a push for new studies to prove the findings in other age groups as well.

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