



Why Socio-Emotional Skills Matter: Findings Revealed by an Evidence-Based Study of Students' Feedback

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Abstract

In today's knowledge-based society, young adults need to work on their social and emotional skills to grow both personally and professionally. This study, grounded in empirical evidence, reflects students' perceptions regarding the degree of guidance received in clarifying their career choices and in augmenting their socio-emotional competencies pertinent to their labor market adaptation. The program aims to support students in their transition into the workforce and improve their personal and professional growth. The study used a mixed-methods approach, quantitative and qualitative, structured into a feedback questionnaire, administered to 137 third-year undergraduates at Politehnica University. The qualitative approach emphasizes a wide range of development levels in students' perceptions and feedback, covering aspects of real life, from higher self-awareness, improved emotional control, stronger communication and interpersonal skills, and strengthened self-confidence to greater clarity in professional choices. Keeping emotional balance, managing stress properly, and attempting to achieve better well-being remain the key socio-emotional skills that help students create a more favorable academic environment. Universities should investigate appropriate policies to integrate emotional well-being into their vision of development, especially referring to the introduction of mental health programs, peer-support networks, and staff training centered on effective communication skills.

Keywords: Career choices; career counseling pathways; emotional well-being; individualized support and feedback; labor market; socio-emotional competencies

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1. Socio-emotional competences – a core vector in the framework of the European Higher Education Area

In a world where the AI revolution has reshaped the relationship between supply and demand in the labor market, transformative perspectives are focusing on reducing the low predictability of the near future, both for the labor market and for the purposes of formal, secondary, and tertiary education. If the present belongs to AI domination in both work and education, the prospect of the near future could reveal not only the benefits of technological transformations, but also the vulnerabilities they bring, refocusing everyone's attention on the added value provided by the human factor, as elements that cannot be replaced by any artificial intelligence skill.

1.1. Social and Emotional Competencies on the Labour Market

Empirical research and global economic reports conducted by international organizations like the World Economic Forum outline a balanced overview of the jobs that may disappear or may emerge in the future, along with the skills that will be most sought after in the future. Looking at the future skills that the labour market will look for until 2030, we find a set of soft-skills that are not new, but that complement the AI and big data skills that are on the top list: "Analytical thinking remains the most sought-after core skill among employers, with seven out of 10 companies considering it as essential in 2025. This is followed by resilience, flexibility, and agility, along with leadership and social influence." (Future of Jobs Survey, 2025).

Alongside digital skills, soft skills are essential for basic training in universities, as well as for professional success. Pittenger (2015) found that emotional and social competencies were positively related to engagement among IT professionals, underscoring their importance in sustaining motivation and collaboration. Similarly, Urquijo, I. et al. (2019) demonstrated that emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of job satisfaction. Within higher technical education, a large systematic review (Mohammed & Ozdamli, 2022) highlights that despite high technical competence, graduates lack essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, creating a gap between new graduates and industry expectations. Moreover, a recent meta-analysis revealed that "emotional intelligence was significantly related to career adaptability, career decision-making self-efficacy, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, salary, career commitment, career decision-making difficulties, career satisfaction, entrepreneurial intentions, and turnover intentions" (Pirsoul et al., 2023).

The present paper aims to explore the perceived relevance of social and emotional competencies among students in technical programs within the National University of Science and Technology POLITEHNICA Bucharest, analyzing their perceptions of personal development and identifying possible educational interventions to support a holistic formation of future professionals.

1.2. Theoretical Frameworks on Social and Emotional Competencies

As defined by OECD in 2015, *Social and Emotional Skills* are "(...) individual capacities that can be (a) manifested in consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours, (b) developed through formal and informal learning experiences, and (c) important drivers of socio-economic outcomes throughout the individual's life" (OECD, 2015, p. 35).

According to this model, socio-emotional skills are more strongly related to quality of life indicators like mental health and subjective well-being than with IQ and other cognitive skills (Chernyshenko, Kankaraš, Drasgow, 2018).

A seminal meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011), which reviewed over 200 school-based programs, demonstrated that socio-emotional skills training has significant positive effects on attitudes, behavior, and academic performance. Subsequent research confirmed these findings, showing that socio-emotional skill development was the strongest predictor of well-being at follow-up (6 to 18 years postintervention) (Taylor et al., 2017). Domitrovich (2017) showed that socio-emotional skills development in school associates with social, behavioral, and academic outcomes important for healthy development and predicts important life outcomes in adulthood.

1.3. Social and Emotional Competencies in Technical Education

Within the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), social and emotional competencies have become an essential part of the training of university students, aiming to better prepare them as citizens as well as competitive professionals (Crespí & García-Ramos, 2020).

There is growing interest in integrating soft skills into the educational and professional training of technical specialists. This is especially true given that employers tend to place at least as much importance on soft skills as on technical skills. The Caeiro-Rodriguez et al. (2021) extensive and recent research evaluates the promotion and teaching of soft skills in engineering higher education across 5 European countries: Greece, Estonia, Denmark, Portugal, and Spain, revealing practice-based and collaboration-oriented methods along with problem-solving or project-based approaches to teach soft skills, as the most relevant ones. Moreover, other research results reveal differences in soft skills according to the gender as early as ten years old (K.V. Keefer, 2015), and promote integration of soft skills development in the university curricula (Encinas et al., 2020). A longitudinal research among university students and faculty within the Technical University of Madrid highlights the benefit of developing socio-emotional skills over academic achievement and the increase in students' competitiveness in the business world (Casado-Fernández et al., 2019).

Pedagogical innovations in teaching socio-emotional skills among engineering students in Spain, such as cooperative learning, gamification, and flipped-classroom models, have been associated with a positive perception of the development and enhancement of skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, and the effective use of information and communication technologies (Sanz-Angulo et al., 2025). Other systematic reviews in technical education (software engineering) reinforce the importance of social and emotional skills for professional success. Categorizing soft skills as follows: as follows: teamwork and communication, leadership, and critical thinking. Garoussi et al (2018) synthesized findings from 33 studies conducted across 12 countries, encompassing over 4,000 data points, and showed that “Soft skills contribute significantly to individual learning, team performance, client relations and awareness of the business context”.

Similarly, answering the question “How can higher education help students become great software developers in an ever-changing industry?” Groeneveld et al. (2019), in their systematic review, identify self-reflection, conflict resolution, communication, and teamwork as the top four taught skills most valued by employers. Their findings further underscore the need for higher education technical curricula to integrate socio-emotionally oriented training.

Together, these findings support the perspective that soft skills and especially socio-emotional ones are important to both the academic and professional success of students in technical disciplines.

1.4. The goals and hypotheses of the research

Our research sought to accomplish the subsequent **objectives**:

1. to evaluate students' perspectives regarding the significance and utility of group counselling sessions in the enhancement of socio-emotional skills and in clarifying career choices.
2. to find out the participants' feedback about the training program's strengths and limitations.
3. to assess the students' perceptions about their ability to manage the daily life situation using socio-emotional skills practiced during the training program.

Hypotheses for Research

- H1. Students consider that the socio-emotional skills training program will help them grow, personally and professionally.
- H2. Most students believe that participating in the group counseling sessions helped them figure out their career options.
- H3. Students who feel properly supported by the counseling sessions in clarifying their transition to the labor market often gain more confidence and better socio-emotional control in daily life situations.

2. Research methodology

This study used a quantitative, descriptive-analytical technique to assess students' perceptions of the effectiveness of group counseling sessions within a training program designed to develop socio-emotional skills. This study focused on students' perceptions regarding the support they got in understanding their career options and in developing the social and emotional skills needed for the workforce.

2.1. Participants

The target group consisted of 137 students of the third year of undergraduate studies, enrolled in different engineering specializations, from all faculties of POLITEHNICA University, Bucharest Campus, with a balanced gender distribution (46,72% female and 53,28% male). The students are participants in an educational project, and they were selected based on their voluntary involvement in the project's activities (for example, the socio-emotional competencies training program). The project activity - 2.2: *Delivery of a Socio-Emotional Competencies Training Program for 270 Students from Bucharest-Ilfov Region* - was implemented over a period of **four months** for stage 1/first year of project (April–July 2025). Group counseling sessions focused on socio-emotional competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, resilience, and career adaptability, while follow-up individual counseling and coaching sessions addressed students' personalized needs, including autonomy, career planning, and stress management.

2.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding participants' perceptions, anticipated outcomes, and reported levels of satisfaction with several contentious issues. There were 9 questions on the instrument, some of which were open-ended and some of which were closed-ended. Some items included more than one sub-section, which meant that more responses were looked at.

Closed-ended questions were based on three- and five-point Likert scales and asked how much the person agreed with statements about: • how useful and applicable the information was; • how relevant group counseling sessions were for personal and professional growth; • how satisfied they were with the methods and materials used; • and how much they thought the program helped them make career decisions and get a job.

The first part of the form asked about things like gender, where you live, and what you study.

2.3. Data analysis

The online survey went out soon after the socio-emotional competencies training program wrapped up in May 2025. Participants were encouraged to share their opinions based on their experiences, especially considering they hadn't had formal training in developing socio-emotional skills. The questionnaire took about ten minutes for each participant to finish. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and correlational statistical methods. To summarize students' perspectives and levels of satisfaction, we used descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and standard deviations.

Correlation analyses were performed to investigate the relationships among different variables. These included the contribution of the socio-emotional training program, the level of satisfaction, its impact on daily life, and the perceived usefulness of the program. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the participants' open-ended comments about the program's relevance and value.

3. Results

To define their identity, the main tasks of young adults are to complete their studies, relate effectively with their peers, maintain harmonious relationships with their parents, and form healthy and lasting romantic relationships. The main process that supports identity development is exploring opportunities with the aim of making the most suitable choices. In the process of exploration, socializing with peers and the educational contexts to which emerging adults are exposed are essential for self-discovery, for understanding others, and for connecting one's own values to those of the community. At this stage, socio-emotional skills such as emotional management, motivation, flexibility, etc., are essential, as they are what make the students resilient in the face of the inevitable failures within the maturation process. An important dimension of identity that plays a central role during emerging adulthood is vocational identity. This refers to gaining a clear understanding of one's occupational interests, skills, career goals, values, and the relationships between self-perceptions and career roles. Vocational identity provides meaning and direction, increases adaptability in the face of stress and challenges, and contributes to choosing a career that reflects the young person's aspirations. (Arnett, 2000)

In the following pages, based on the main socio-emotional development characteristics of young adults, highlighted above, we will analyze relevant results from the feedback questionnaire regarding the socio-emotional skills of young adults, highlighting various findings, correlations, and key conclusions drawn from the processed data.

The questionnaire begins with an item assessing if third-year undergraduate students have a clear career choice for their future professional path. (*11. At this point in your studies, do you have a clear career choice for your future professional path?*) A proportion of **55.47%** reported having a clearly defined career choice, whereas **36.5%** stated that they are still undecided about their future professional route.

Considering that the respondents were approaching their internship placements in companies and organizations, a stage essential for identifying or validating career choices, and for exploring potential employment opportunities, it would be reasonable to expect that the proportion of undecided students would be lower than one quarter of the sample. Their imminent transition to the labor market highlights this expectation. This result may suggest, either directly or indirectly, the need for **earlier career counseling interventions**, as well as more **intentional guidance from the academic staff** coordinating these internships, in order to strengthen students' engagement with exploring and defining their professional pathways.

The subsequent item (I2) investigated the extent to which participation in the group counseling sessions provided through the training program has helped students clarify issues related to socio-emotional competencies, ensuring a better adjustment to the requirements of the labor market. (I2. *Do you consider that the counselling sessions have helped you clarify issues related to socio-emotional competencies, ensuring a better adjustment to the requirements of the labor market?*). Approximately 75% of respondents reported a positive contribution, indicating that the sessions enhanced their understanding of concepts and ideas specific to counseling and socio-emotional competence development. In contrast, 17.52% stated that they are not yet able to assess this impact.

A correlation between the results of the two items mentioned above demonstrates that, although the students participating in the counselling sessions are relatively confused and about half of them don't know which career path to pursue, still $\frac{3}{4}$ of them believe that this training program has helped them clarify not necessary their career path, but those socio-emotional soft skills that will increase their chances of adapting better to the demands of the current labor market. Figure 1 below illustrates the correlation between I1 and I2.

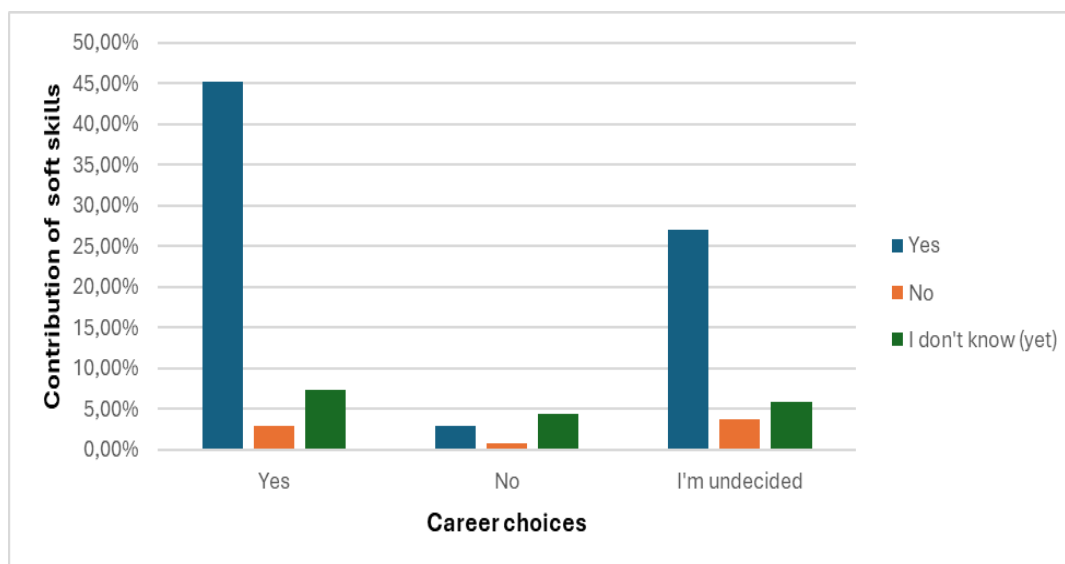


Figure 1. The correlation between the contribution of socio-emotional skills to clarifying career choices (I1 vs. I2)

Item 3 proposes a qualitative analysis of perceived benefits by students at the end of the training program. Analysis of the open-ended responses reveals several converging themes that describe the most significant personal and professional benefits perceived by students following their participation in the socio-emotional competencies training program. The themes presented below emerged through inductive coding and represent the most frequently reported patterns across the dataset.

Theme 1: Knowing yourself better and being able to control your feelings

This was the most popular theme. Students often talked on how much better they understood their feelings, actions, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. They also said they knew how to deal with their feelings and understood them better.

Here are some examples of parts:

"I learned more about myself and how to deal with my emotions."

"I learned how to stay calm and figure out how I feel when things get tough."

• *"The sessions helped me figure out what I need and what I care about."*

This theme shows that the program taught people critical intrapersonal skills that are necessary for mental toughness and personal growth.

Theme 2: Improved social and communication abilities

Many people said they learned how to be more empathetic, listen carefully, and get along better with their classmates. Students said that chatting to individuals at school, work, and in social situations made them feel more confident in themselves.

One participant said, *"I learned to listen and talk to people more kindly."; "I learned more about myself and other people, which made it easier for me to get along with them."; "The socialization exercises made it easier for me to talk to people."*

This topic shows how the program helps people work together better, adapt to new situations, and get along with others.

Theme 3: Be more self-confident and less stressed

Many of the people who answered said they felt more confident at school and work, especially when it came to job interviews or internships. Some folks said that their stress and emotional pain had improved.

For example, *"My confidence in interviews went up a lot."; "The sessions helped me feel less anxious about the internship."; "I feel safer and more balanced when I'm with other people."*

This theme shows that kids are getting stronger and more sure of themselves, which is good because they need to be able to deal with harsh situations.

Theme 4: Help in deciding what you want to do for a job and how to get there

Students said that the advice they had helped figure out what they wanted to do for a livelihood, what their career aspirations were, and where they wanted to go in the future. Many people who answered said they have learnt more about their skills or career goals.

A lot of people commented, *"I was shown the best career path for me."; "The sessions made me think about what I really wanted to do."; • "I learned how to make better choices and my mind became clearer."*

This subject is perfect for the program's goal of helping people learn about different jobs and make it easier for them to find work.

Theme 5: Learning how to work together and as a team

The respondents who answered the question said they like working with others, cooperating, and doing group exercises. Some people said it was important to learn in a group where others were supportive and didn't judge you.

One thing people remarked about was, *"I learned how to work better with others."; "Working in groups helped me learn to trust others."; "I knew how important it was to pay attention to others and not ignore them."*

This theme shows that people are getting better at interacting with others, which is important for getting along with coworkers.

Theme 6: Having a better emotional state and a better feeling of balance

Others said that the sessions made them feel more stable, think more clearly, or take a break from the stress of homework for a bit. They liked being in a safe place where they could think about how they felt.

For instance, *"I found inner balance and more peace of mind."; "It felt like a break from all the noise at school."; "The sessions helped me feel more stable and clear-headed."*

Overall, the analysis above emphasizes five main **areas of impact**:

1. *Intrapersonal development*: knowing how you feel, managing your inner resources, and introspection.
2. *Interpersonal growth*: connecting friends and colleagues, talking to people, raising the quality of relationships, showing that you care.
3. *Professional confidence*: being ready for an interview, making decisions, and feeling less nervous.

4. *Job orientation* means knowing what kinds of occupations are available and desiring to learn more about them.

5. *Well-being* and emotional balance: less stress and more stability.

These results suggest that the program to train students on social and emotional skills had a lot of benefits that were in keeping with its goals, which were mostly to help students get ready for work.

These results suggest that the socio-emotional skills training program helped students get ready for employment, which was one of its key goals.

We also ask the students to underline the modifications that were proposed in a qualitative examination of Item 4. It's interesting to see that many of the participants' thoughts reveal that they realize how emotional intelligence affects not only personal progress but also getting a job. This knowledge is an important first step in the bigger process of professional growth. Career counseling and developing socio-emotional skills assist students in using their personal talents to secure employment and navigate daily stressors.

A qualitative analysis of their responses to the question of what may be improved in the operation and delivery of the socio-emotional skills training program revealed several recurring themes.

Theme 1: More sessions that go longer and happen more often

A common pattern in the data shows that students want to be more involved in counseling activities. The people who took the poll said they wanted more sessions, longer sessions, or a longer implementation period to help them learn and think more thoroughly.

People remarked things like, *"More sessions like this would be very helpful."*; *"Two meetings aren't enough; more would be better."*; *"Counseling sessions should last longer so they can talk about more parts of a student's life."*; *"I want these kinds of things to last longer so I can think about them more and grow."* This theme shows that people really like the program and that they want to keep working on their personal and social-emotional growth.

Theme 2: More contact and smaller groupings

Several students stated that smaller groups would facilitate deeper discussions, enhance interaction, and provide more personalized assistance.

Some extracts are: *"More sessions, possibly with fewer participants, emphasizing natural interaction and collaborative problem-solving."*; *"More time in the workshop with fewer people."*

This topic indicates that children appreciate classrooms where they may be active and learn by doing things with each other.

Theme 3: More activities and pieces that are like those in the actual world

Many respondents said they desired more interactive activities, such as simulations, personality tests, or real-life chores that would help them get ready for a career.

Some examples of extracts are: *"More focus on improving soft skills that can be used in interviews."*; *"Add more activities that let students try things out to help them understand and use the ideas better."*; *"Using role-playing to show how important it is to have social and emotional skills."*; *"Activities that go deeper based on tests of personality."* This topic talks about how important it is for students to learn from experience and how much they need to practice what they've learned to get better at it.

Theme 4: Better coordination with school schedules and more flexible scheduling

Students indicated that it was challenging for them to go to sessions that were planned for late in the day or at the same time as their classes. People said that the schedule should be more flexible.

"Maybe schedule the sessions for Saturday mornings; we were already tired during the week."; *"Sessions should not be held during regular class time."*; *"More flexible scheduling so that it doesn't get in the way of other school activities."* This subject recommends a modification in structure that could increase attendance and participation.

Theme 5: More support, guidance, and personal feedback

Several students expressed the need for tailored feedback for guidance to improve their personal development. Some portions are: *"Giving each person feedback after each session would help them grow as a person."*; *"It would have been nice to have more time for open questions and discussions."* This issue suggests that students need individualized help to become more aware of themselves and their abilities.

These themes identified above work together to give us important information that will help in order for us improve the program for the next year of the project, make it more useful, relevant, and accessible for students' personal and professional development.

5. Discussions

One of the relevant items on the questionnaire is **item 6**, especially from the **correlation's** perspective with other questionnaire items, such as **item 2** (already presented) and **9** (related to the level of satisfaction students reported after attending the group counselling sessions regarding the practice of socio-emotional abilities). It integrates specific content elements from the socio-emotional competence training program, from the perspective of the skills developed/practiced based on interactions during group counselling sessions. Thus, the eight statements that are subject to evaluation and are mentioned below highlight real-life situations that involve emotional self-regulation in the face of stress in academic or relational/personal life, negotiation, and the appropriate management of various conflicts or disputes in professional or personal relationships.

1. *I feel better prepared to manage my emotions in stressful academic contexts (e.g., presentations, exams, teamwork);*
2. *As a result of the program, I can identify my own emotions more clearly and express them appropriately;*
3. *I have learned to manage conflicts or misunderstandings more effectively in my interactions with others;*
4. *I believe I have acquired useful emotional self-control skills that I can also apply in my daily life;*
5. *I feel like I have a better understanding of prosocial behavior and how I can contribute to a positive relational environment;*
6. *It's easier for me to recognize the emotions of others and respond empathetically in different situations;*
7. *The program helped me develop a more positive attitude toward professional and personal challenge;*
8. *I actively apply emotional regulation techniques in my daily life to cope with stress.*

All these statements belonging to item 6 place the student in concrete situations where they should demonstrate socio-emotional skills, appealing to their own self-assessment ability. Since neither of these skills/abilities are specifically developed in school within specific contexts, and thus have their shortcomings, it is expected that we will see a discrepancy between the formal, desirable discourse found in declared responses versus the real situation where a student should cope with appropriate and adapted emotional solutions when facing everyday stress (e.g., managing emotions in stressful academic contexts; self-identifying emotions and expressing them appropriately behaviorally; managing conflicts in peer interactions; responding with empathy and a positive attitude when facing professional or personal challenges, etc.).

The recorded percentage differences indicate that over 60% of students believe they possess the evaluated aspects to a large and very large extent on the Likert scale. This suggests a need for practice in applying these methods and skills, both in academic settings and personal life. Specifically, practice in real-life situations is essential for students to validate their acquisition and application of key concepts necessary for developing emotional intelligence.

5.1. Correlations between Item 6 and Item 2

However, upon closer examination, we can make a **few observations based on correlations** with other items in the questionnaire. We have chosen to present a few specific aspects and correlations with item 2 (*I2. Do you consider that the counselling sessions have helped you clarify issues related to socio-emotional competencies, ensuring a better adjustment to the requirements of the labor market?*), as follows:

a. In general, most of the aspects evaluated (6.1-6.8) are positive correlations that confirm the link between the high percentage of students (%) who responded that the socio-emotional skills training program helped them clarify how these skills are a valuable asset for adapting to the demands of the labor market and the equally high percentage of students (%) who state that after participating in this program, they are better able to identify their own emotions, manage them better in real-life personal, social, and academic situations, and manage conflicts or misunderstandings in their interactions with others, which implies the existence of emotional self-regulation skills.

b. If we take item 6.6 as a reference and correlate it with item 2 of the questionnaire, we have the following situation:

Variable A (6.6.) – "It's easier for me to recognize the emotions of others and respond empathetically in different situations." → A measure of the development of emotional recognition and empathy skills.

Variable B (Item 2) – "Participating in the counselling sessions helped me clarify useful aspects..." → A measure of the perceived usefulness of the counselling program.

We can draw the following **partial conclusions**:

- Participants who feel they have become more empathetic are the same ones who appreciate counselling as being helpful. **The higher the reported level of empathy improvement, the greater the likelihood of considering the program useful.**

- Thus, over 75% of respondents who state that the sessions supported them in clarifying how to use their skills (I2) also indicate that it is easier for them to recognize the emotions of others. In contrast, the proportions of those who answer "No" or "I don't know/I haven't decided yet" to Item 6.6 are particularly present among those who perceive a lower degree of program usefulness in Item 2.

- Thus, it can be stated that there is a strong positive association between the two variables, highlighting the fact that understanding the adaptive role of socio-emotional competencies is correlated with the development of empathic abilities.

- Based on the percentage distribution, a chi-square test of association can be applied to determine if the two variables are statistically related. The contingency table between Item 2 and Item 6.6 was analyzed using a **χ^2 test of association**. The results indicate a statistically significant association between the two variables, $\chi^2(df)$, $p < .001$, highlighting that the observed frequencies differ significantly from those expected based on independence. Participants who reported a high level of clarity regarding the role of socio-emotional skills were significantly more likely to indicate that it is easier for them to recognize the emotions of others and respond empathetically.

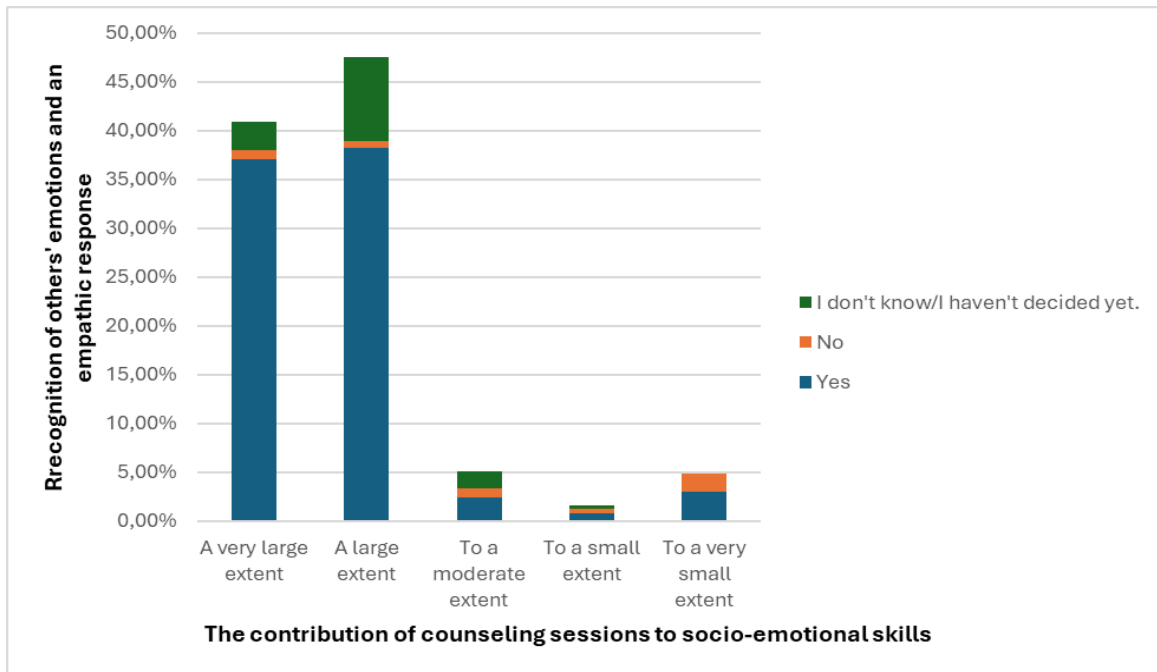


Figure 2. The correlation between the recognition of others' emotions/empathic response and the contribution of counseling sessions to socio-emotional skills (I6.6 vs. I2)

5.2. Correlations between Item 9 and Item 2

We continue the analysis of correlations by presenting the one between Item 2 and Item 9, explaining what each variable measures:

- Item 2: Measures participants' perception of the usefulness of the clarifications obtained during the sessions – i.e., whether they better understood how socio-emotional skills help them adapt.
- Item 9: Measures the degree of satisfaction with the information and skills acquired during the counselling.

These two variables are logically connected: if someone feels that the sessions have helped them clarify useful aspects (Item 2), it's natural for them to also be satisfied with what they have gained (Item 9). Practice shows that there is a direct and robust relationship between satisfaction and the perception of usefulness, which confirms that the program was well-structured and generated coherence between the lived experience and the perceived benefits.

To demonstrate this statistically highly significant association, I again used the Chi-square test of independence, based on the distribution of responses to item 2 and item 9.

Table 1. Distribution of responses to item 2 and item 9

	Item 2: YES	Item 2: NO	Item 2: I don't know	Total
Item 9: YES	74.64%	2.90%	15.22%	92.75%
Item 9: NO	0.72%	4.35%	2.17%	7.25%
Total	75.36%	7.25%	17.39%	100%

Results of χ^2 : $\chi^2 = 48.10$; $p = 3.58 \times 10^{-11}$; $df = 2$; $p < .001$

Therefore, we found a statistically significant and positive association (satisfaction increases with the perception of competence clarification) between the participants' satisfaction level and their perception of the usefulness of the counselling sessions. In other words, **those who feel they have acquired useful information and skills are precisely the ones who feel the program has helped them clarify how socio-emotional competencies support adaptation.**

6. Limitations

The study provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of the role and applicability of socio-emotional skills practiced during the training program. However, we need to take into consideration several limitations, as follows: (a) the study's findings are mainly based on self-reported data from a feedback questionnaire. In this respect, the results could be biased by social desirability, the way in which participants interpret the meaning of the questions, or their willingness to provide detailed answers. Many times, there is a discrepancy between the formal speech of the respondent and reality. (b) Moreover, the study's sample was somewhat homogeneous, consisting of third-year undergraduates from similar academic backgrounds who subscribed voluntarily to the project's activity. The points mentioned could limit how broadly the findings apply to other student groups or educational settings, and we pay attention to the conclusions we draw and the context we use. (c) In addition, the collected feedback was done right after the program ended. Therefore, it doesn't show the long-term effects or how well the social-emotional skills developed were maintained. A longitudinal study could be developed starting from the present findings, following the target group's students in their future professional track. (d) The qualitative part, while providing a lot of descriptive details, is based on voluntary written answers. This means it might not fully represent the whole range of experiences possibly collected from the participants. Moreover, we selected and revised answers collected from open-ended questions in an effort to categorize them. The future research should extend the level of analysis as much as possible, including additional methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or long-term studies.

7. Conclusions and implications for educational practice

Overall, the findings suggest that socio-emotional skills play a crucial role not only in students' personal development but also in their readiness to transition into the labor market. For this reason, the universities should pay attention to some of the following **qualitative issues**:

- *Integrating socio-emotional skills training into university programs*: Given that students strongly emphasized the importance of better self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication, it's reasonable to argue that socio-emotional skills' development should be more systematically integrated into academic programs. Integrating these elements into required or optional university courses would ensure that all students have access to these skills, promoting both their well-being and their future career preparation.
- *Career counseling and guidance through specialized services*: The indecision that defines this stage of students' personal development affects job choices, identification of vocational interests and values, even when they have career opportunities displayed, access to internships, employers' meetings etc. This is why they need earlier and more consistent career guidance through specialized services. The introduction of ongoing mentorship initiatives commencing in the initial year of study, integration of specific modules dedicated to career exploration, the development of interpersonal skills, and the preparation for practical professional environments represent only starting points for a transformative challenge in universities educational policies, policies that encourage collaboration between faculty and Career Counseling and Guidance Centre, as happens at the POLITEHNICA University.

- *Fostering an educational environment that values emotional well-being*: Keeping the emotional balance, managing the level of stress, and attempting a better well-being remain the key socio-emotional skills that help students to create a more favorable academic environment. Universities should investigate appropriate policies to integrate emotional well-being into their vision of development, especially referring to the introduction of mental health programs, peer-support networks, and staff training centered on effective communication skills.
- *Aligning socio-emotional development with the needs of the job market*: This is a complex subject because one of the main goals when we do teamwork, no matter academic or professional organizations, is not only to have a team technically proficient, but also to adjust to managing relationships with calm and understanding. Therefore, educational programs should be designed to help students develop these essential skills. At the same time, corporations need to explicitly define the socio-emotional skills they value. This alignment could help students succeed in their careers and contribute positively to their workplace. Educational policy should foster partnerships with industry leaders to create training programs together, and many initiatives already carried out in this way show us the power of necessary collaboration between education and the labor market.

All these issues mentioned above underline the need for consistent institutional support for socio-emotional education in schools, especially in higher education. This support is a key part of academic and professional development, which can provide lasting advantages for students, universities, and the wider socio-economic environment.

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