

Exploring the Innovative Path of Cultivating Social-Emotional Competence of Adolescents in the Digital Era

Chunfa Huang*

Tianjin Academy of Educational Sciences, Tianjin 300191, China

*Corresponding author: Chunfa Huang, 465562148@qq.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: With the arrival of the digital era, the growing environment of adolescents has changed significantly, and the cultivation of social-emotional competence also faces new challenges and opportunities. Starting from analyzing the new requirements for adolescents' social-emotional competence in the digital era, this paper actively explores the current situation and deficiencies of adolescents' social-emotional competence cultivation and puts forward strategies and suggestions for innovating the path of adolescents' social-emotional competence cultivation in the digital era. Through the integration of digital educational resources, the use of new media technology, the promotion of emotional education courses, and the strengthening of home-school cooperation, schools can effectively help adolescents better adapt to the social environment of the digital era, enhance their social-emotional competence, and promote their overall development.

Keywords: Digital era; Adolescents; Social-emotional competence; Innovative paths

Online publication: June 7, 2024

1. Introduction

At present, the cultivation of social-emotional competence among adolescents has received widespread attention in the educational endeavors of various countries and regions. Social-emotional competence has been placed on an equal footing with cognitive competence in the competence literacy frameworks for the twenty-first century introduced by several countries and regions^[1]. With the advent of the digital era, the rapid development of information technology is reshaping young people's daily lives, communication and interaction, and modes of thinking at an unprecedented speed^[2]. This change not only affects their cognitive development and knowledge acquisition but also influences their socio-emotional competence more profoundly. As digital media become part of adolescents' lives, traditional approaches to socio-emotional competence development face new challenges^[3]. In such a context, studying the impact of the digital era on adolescents' socio-emotional competence and the challenges it poses is not only an important contribution to the field of education but also a far-reaching consideration for the healthy and harmonious development of society in the future. This study aims

to explore how to assess and enhance adolescents' socio-emotional competence in the digital environment and how to utilize digital technology itself as a cultivation tool to innovate the path of socio-emotional competence to adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing society.

2. The connotation and significance of adolescents' social-emotional competence

2.1. Connotation of adolescent social-emotional competence

Social-emotional competence is a personality psychological characteristic of students' cognition and management of self, others, and society, which is necessary for students' healthy growth and happy life. It is also an important content of students' core literacy^[4]. Adolescence, as a critical period for developing social-emotional competence, can further promote the development of students' social-emotional competence and enhance their sense of well-being and achievement motivation through effective educational interventions and systematic learning^[5-6]. Adolescent social-emotional competence mainly refers to adolescents' ability to understand, express, and manage emotions in social interactions.

Adolescent social-emotional competence includes emotion recognition and understanding, in which adolescents can accurately recognize their own and other people's emotional states, and understand the reasons behind their emotions and their significance in different situations. Social-emotional competence also includes emotion expression and communication, in which adolescents can appropriately express their personal emotions and needs through both verbal and nonverbal means, such as facial expressions, body language, and intonation. It also involves emotion regulation and management, in which adolescents can effectively manage and regulate their emotions to adapt to different social environments and achieve personal goals. Empathy and pro-social behavior involve adolescents who can put themselves in other people's shoes, feel other people's emotions, and demonstrate compassionate and helpful behaviors. Social skills and interpersonal relationships demonstrate the adolescent's ability to collaborate, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and build friendships when interacting with others. Finally, self-awareness and self-reflection, in which adolescents are aware of their own attributes, abilities, and emotions, and can express them appropriately. Overall, social-emotional competence involves the adolescents' awareness of their attributes, abilities, emotions, and behavioral patterns, and their ability to self-monitor and self-improve based on this awareness. This improves their decision-making and problem-solving ability to use emotional information to make sound decisions and find solutions to problems when faced with challenges.

2.2. The significance of social-emotional competence in adolescents

2.2.1. Promoting personal development

Social-emotional competence enables adolescents to better understand and deal with internal emotional experiences, enhance self-knowledge, and form a positive self-concept. This not only helps adolescents construct a healthy psychological state but also helps them make wiser and more mature decisions in the face of life choices, thus promoting their development towards a more comprehensive and balanced direction.

2.2.2. Improving interpersonal relationships

Good social-emotional competence helps adolescents build harmonious relationships in their interactions with key people such as peers, family members, and teachers. They can effectively perceive and respond to the emotional needs of others, reduce misunderstandings and conflicts, and enhance intimacy and trust, thus gaining better social support and higher interpersonal status in the collective.

2.2.3. Enhancement of academic achievement

School is an environment full of social interactions, and social-emotional competence can help adolescents better adapt to this environment. They can control and regulate mood swings in class and establish positive interactions with teachers and classmates, thus staying focused and motivated academically. In addition, activities such as teamwork and group discussions require good social-emotional competence, all of which are integral parts of the modern education system.

2.2.4. Facilitating future career development

In the workplace, in addition to professional skills, social-emotional competence is equally indispensable. It involves leadership, teamwork, customer service, conflict resolution, and many other aspects. Adolescents with strong social-emotional competence are more likely to build an effective network of interpersonal relationships at work, enhance job satisfaction, quickly adapt to the ever-changing professional environment, and succeed in their future careers.

3. New requirements and challenges for adolescents' social-emotional competence in the digital age

3.1. New requirements for adolescents' social-emotional competence in the digital era

3.1.1. Enhancing emotional understanding and expression in virtual socialization

In the digital era, adolescents' social activities have increasingly shifted to online environments, such as social media platforms, instant messengers, and online forums. This shift requires adolescents to be able to adapt to the characteristics of virtual socialization, the most critical of which is the enhancement of emotional understanding and expression. The absence of nonverbal cues in virtual social environments requires adolescents to rely on limited information such as text, emoticons, pictures, and videos to interpret the emotions and intentions of others. At the same time, they need to learn how to appropriately express their emotions and attitudes through these digital tools to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively.

3.1.2. Enhancing network literacy and information security awareness

With the rapid development of information technology, adolescents are exposed to an ever-increasing amount of information, and recognizing the authenticity of information has become an important skill. Adolescents need to be able to think critically to assess the source, accuracy, and credibility of information on the Internet. In addition, the security of personal information has become an important issue in the digital age. Adolescents must be aware of the possible risks of oversharing personal information, such as privacy leakage, online fraud, and identity theft, and take appropriate measures to protect themselves online.

3.1.3. Cultivate empathy and tolerance

The online environment in the digital era provides an unprecedented multicultural communication platform for teenagers. In such an environment, teenagers may encounter a variety of different viewpoints and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is particularly important to cultivate empathy and tolerance. Adolescents need to learn to understand and respect different viewpoints and cultural differences from others' perspectives, thus promoting harmonious coexistence in a pluralistic society and avoiding cyber violence and hate speech.

3.1.4. Strengthen self-management and maintain physical and mental health

The digital era has brought about the convenience of using electronic devices, but at the same time, it may also

lead to teenagers' over-dependence and even addiction to electronic devices and online games. Such overuse not only affects adolescents' physical health, such as visual impairment and reduced sleep quality but may also have a negative impact on their mental health, such as distraction, reduced learning efficiency, and degradation of social skills. Therefore, adolescents need to develop self-regulation skills, rationalize the use of electronic devices, and ensure sufficient physical activity and social interaction to maintain overall physical and mental health.

3.2. New challenges to adolescents' socio-emotional competence in the digital age

3.2.1. Internet dependence and addiction

Research shows that adolescents are prone to dependence and even addiction to online games and social media. This phenomenon may lead to hindering the development of their social-emotional competence in real life. Adolescents immersed in the virtual world for a long time may lack the necessary face-to-face social experience, which negatively affects the overall development of their interpersonal skills.

3.2.2. Information overload and sifting

The vast amount of information on the Internet is both a treasure trove and a trap for adolescents. As their experience and judgment are not yet mature, they may have difficulty in sifting out the true and valuable content from a large amount of information. In addition, the influence of online public opinion and cyberbullying may adversely affect adolescents' mental health and socio-emotional development.

3.2.3. Privacy protection and cybersecurity risks

With the popularization of digital life, adolescents face increasing risks of personal privacy leakage and cybersecurity. While enjoying the convenience of technology, they must also learn how to protect their personal privacy and information security. This is not only a technical issue, but also an important aspect involving socio-emotional competence.

3.2.4. Lack of education on socio-emotional competence

Even though social-emotional competencies are crucial to the growth of young people, the current education system has not yet paid enough attention to the cultivation of these competencies. In the digital age, methods to effectively integrate education on social-emotional competencies into daily teaching have become an urgent issue for educators and policymakers.

4. The current situation and shortcomings of the cultivation of social-emotional competence of adolescents in the digital era

4.1. The current situation of the cultivation of social-emotional competence of adolescents in the current era

4.1.1. Emphasize educational policies

With the promotion of the concept of whole-person education, education policymakers and schools are paying more and more attention to the overall development of students, which includes the enhancement of social-emotional competence. By formulating relevant policies, the education department encourages schools to incorporate the cultivation of social-emotional competence into the education system, such as setting up mental health education courses and organizing social practice activities, to promote the development of students' social-emotional skills.

4.1.2. Increasing social cognition

At the social level, parents and educators are gradually increasing their awareness of social-emotional competence. They have begun to realize that in addition to academic performance, social-emotional competence is equally important to students' future personal development and social adaptation. Therefore, family education and school education have begun to focus on cultivating children's emotional expression and interpersonal skills.

4.1.3. Increased practical cultivation methods

To enhance students' social-emotional abilities, some schools have begun to try to offer relevant emotional education courses or integrate emotional education into daily teaching activities. These practical courses aim to help students learn and practice social-emotional skills in real situations through specific teaching activities and interactive experiences.

4.2. Deficiencies in the current cultivation of social-emotional skills among youths

4.2.1. Limitations of the traditional education model

Despite the progress in the field of education, the traditional education model still focuses too much on the transmission of knowledge and neglects the attention to and cultivation of students' social-emotional competence. This knowledge-biased approach to education leads to deficiencies in students' practical and interpersonal skills.

4.2.2. Inadequate awareness of the challenges of the digital age

Some schools and families have insufficient awareness of the challenges posed by the digital era and fail to develop students' socio-emotional competence in response to these challenges. For example, the cultivation of understanding and expressing emotions accurately in virtual environments, enhancing cyber literacy and information security awareness is not yet adequate.

4.2.3. Influence of social and network environment

Changes in the social and network environments have had a significant impact on adolescents' emotional development and interpersonal skills. The growing problems of cyberbullying and information flooding have challenged the psychological and social skills of adolescents. However, the current education system is still inadequate in dealing with these problems.

4.2.4. Insufficiently systematized cultivation methods

Although some schools and educational institutions have begun to try to cultivate adolescents' social-emotional competence, these attempts often lack systematization and coherence and fail to form a scientific and effective cultivation system.

4.2.5. Teachers are unskilled and lack an assessment system

At present, many schools lack professional teachers in the cultivation of social-emotional competence, and at the same time, they have not established a scientific and effective assessment system to accurately understand the level of students' emotional competence and the cultivation effect. This limits the quality and depth of socio-emotional competence cultivation.

5. Innovative path of cultivating social-emotional competence of adolescents in the digital era

5.1. Integrate digital resources and build a diversified education content system

To adapt to the educational needs of the digital era, educators should make full use of network platforms and digital resources to create a diversified and interactive learning environment for young people. This environment not only provides traditional knowledge transfer but also integrates elements of social-emotional competence development. For example, through role-playing games provided by online education platforms, adolescents can learn emotional understanding and expression in simulated real-life scenarios, thereby enhancing empathy and communication skills. Social media and online communities can also serve as important platforms for cultivating adolescents' socio-emotional competence, encouraging them to participate in topic discussions and experience sharing, and practicing their language expression and teamwork skills. In addition, the anonymity of online communities helps introverted adolescents participate in social activities more actively and gradually improve their social confidence.

5.2. Innovative education methods that combine individualization and comprehensive development

Project-based learning is a modern educational method that can effectively promote the practical ability and innovative thinking of adolescents. In project-based learning, adolescents explore and solve real problems, which not only improves their practical ability but also cultivates the spirit of collaboration and a sense of responsibility in teamwork. Teachers should guide adolescents in this process to pay attention to the emotional needs of team members and learn to respect and understand each other. Emotional education is also an indispensable part of the cultivation process. Teachers should pay attention to the emotional changes of adolescents and help them establish a positive and healthy mindset and emotional expression through activities such as mental health lectures and emotional sharing sessions. At the same time, the emotional education program can guide teenagers to learn to self-regulate their emotions and improve their control of frustration and self-knowledge.

5.3. Strengthening home-school-community cooperation to form educational synergy

School is an important venue for practicing social-emotional learning, but young people are also developing social-emotional competence all the time, every day, at home, at school, and in the community^[7]. In the digital age, the role of family education is becoming increasingly prominent. Parents should actively participate in their children's online activities and help them develop good online habits and information literacy by working together to establish online rules and set reasonable online hours. Parents should also pay attention to their children's emotional needs and provide sufficient care and support to help them build up self-confidence and a sound personality. In their communication and cooperation with parents, schools should pay attention to the development of their children's social-emotional competence, and enhance parents' educational awareness and competence through parent-teacher conferences, family education guidance, and other activities. Schools can utilize online platforms to strengthen daily communication with parents, provide timely feedback on children's school performance and emotional changes, and work together to promote children's overall development. In addition, social-emotional competence can influence adolescents' peer relationships through social support, thus promoting better adolescent development^[8]. Social resources should be further integrated to allow children to go deeper into society to carry out learning and practice, such as cooperating with community organizations to provide young people with opportunities for social practice and service learning, so that they can practice their social-emotional competence in practical activities. Hence, making use of social resources such as public

libraries and museums to organize educational activities and seminars can broaden young people's horizons and enhance their social understanding.

5.4. Carry out interdisciplinary integration education to improve network security literacy

As an innovative educational model, interdisciplinary integration education can break the traditional disciplinary boundaries and combine the cultivation of social-emotional competence with the knowledge of other disciplines. For example, the education of social-emotional competence is integrated into the language curriculum, and students are guided to understand and analyze the emotional motives of different characters through the relationships and emotional conflicts of characters in literary works, to enhance their emotional awareness and empathy. In science education, students' collaborative abilities and sense of responsibility can be cultivated through team experimental projects. Teachers can design experimental tasks that require teamwork to accomplish so that students can learn how to communicate effectively, reconcile differences, and play to their strengths in a team. Math education can also be integrated with social-emotional competency development. By solving real-life problems, such as the application of statistics in social sciences, students can not only learn mathematical knowledge, but also understand the connection between mathematics and the real world, and cultivate their sense of social responsibility and application ability. Cybersecurity literacy is one of the important socio-emotional competencies in the digital age. Educators should design specialized curricula and activities to teach young people how to identify online risks, including online fraud and personal information leakage, and take measures to protect their online safety. Educators should also emphasize cyber ethics and etiquette to guide youth in establishing proper online behavioral norms. By discussing topics such as cyberbullying and information copyright, students will be able to understand the impact of online behaviors on others and themselves, develop a sense of responsible cyber citizenship, and help them make wise decisions and build healthy interpersonal relationships in the cyber environment, and ultimately become well-rounded people adapted to the future society.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Zhu ZT, Dai L, Zhao XW, et al., 2024, Cultivation of New Quality Talents: A New Mission for Education in the Age of Digital Intelligence. *Research on E-Chemical Education*, 45(01): 52–60.
- [2] Jie X, 2023, The Way of Sound Personality Education for Young People in the New Era. *People's Education*, 2023(Z2): 100–103.
- [3] Qu LJ, Chen MX, 2023, A Review of the Perspectives and Developmental Orientations of Research on the Social-Emotional Competence of Primary and Secondary School Students in China. *Journal of Suzhou University (Educational Science Edition)*, 11(04): 42–52.
- [4] Li WY, Wang WH, 2023, How does Cyberbullying Affect Adolescents' Social-emotional Competence? The Moderating Role of School Climate. *Contemporary Youth Studies*, 2023(03): 82–97.
- [5] Tu TL, Lu MY, 2021, Cultural Perspectives in Social-emotional Learning: The Crisis of “Cultural Mismatch” and “Culturally Responsive” Practices in Social-emotional Learning in the United States. *Journal of Comparative Education*, 2021(02): 45–61.

- [6] Dong XT, 2021, Making Children Warm Human Beings: An Overview of 10 Years of Practice of Social-emotional Learning Programs in Chinese Schools. *People's Education*, 2021(01): 64–65.
- [7] Tian XW, Xie SN, Wang JY, et al., 2020, The Success Code of Social-emotional Learning in the West: Core Fields and Relational Networks. *Global Education Perspectives*, 49(10): 49–62.
- [8] Zhi AL, 2019, The Cultivation Path of Students' Social-emotional Competence. *Education Academic Monthly*, 2019(11): 70–76.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.