INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL COMPETENCE TRAINING ON PERSONALITY VARIABLES

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Abstract: The article presents the results of our research aimed to verify the influence of social competence training on participants` personalities. The object of our observation was the target group of lecturers. We focused on the development of their social competence and the cultivation of their personalities, which we consider to be one of the essential areas in adult education. For this reason, we wanted to achieve it with social competence training. We tried to find out whether and how the intentional stimulation of lecturers` social competence in the form of training will influence the level of observed personality variables. We measured these variables with a questionnaire NEO-FFI before and after the training finished. In the experimental group which participated in the training, we noticed a statistically significant increase in the values of personality factors E (extraversion) and K (kindness) at the level of significance 0,01; an increase in the values of the variables O (openness to experience) and C (conscientiousness) at the level of significance 0,05, and a decrease in the values of the variable N (neuroticism) at the level of significance 0,01.

Keywords: social competence, social competence training, lecturer, personality, personality variables, NEO-FFI

1 Introduction

The current period is characteristic not only with the scientific-technical development but also with different variables which have an impact on our society. These variables and ongoing progress require healthy, personally mature, educated and creative individuals. For this reason, in the current work employability, it is not enough to have only the institutionalised educational preparation for the work career in the lifelong cycle. The flexibility and the ability to complete and modify their abilities and skills have become crucial in achieving the required professional performance. Therefore, we can talk about continuously increasing requirements on the lifelong development and education of workers in various professions.

We focused on lecturers whose profession is lately in the centre of discussion because of work requirements placed on them. Lecturers work with people; they influence their personal growth; they form and cultivate other people. For this reason, it is crucial so that they possess the competence required for the performance of this profession. We suppose that the high-quality performance of this profession does not depend only on adequate education, but also on necessary personal qualities, social competence and other required skills. We think that social competence has become indispensable and inseparable part of their work.

We agree with opinions of several experts (Bramley, 1997, Hupková, 2011, Komárková, Slaměník, Výrost, 2001, Veteška, 2010) who say that the most intensive way to develop social competence is to provide high-quality professional, theoretical and practical preparation which includes training aimed at the development of the given competences.

The social competence training focuses on the use of active methods for the psychological work in groups, and it aims to develop participants` social competences and personalities (Silberman, Auerbach, 2006). It is possible to understand this training as a systematically planned approach carried out in an artificially created and controlled environment full of trust and confidence. In this way, we can influence the group processes and group behaviour. Based on their experience, participants can develop their social competence which enables them to cope with new social situations, to create positive social interactions and to use more efficient alternatives in their social behaviour (Bratská, 2000, Hermochová, Vaněková, 2001, Müller de Morias, Rapsová, 2017, Spence, 2003).

In the last decades, we noticed a significant boom in the training programmes. There also increased the number of research findings dealing with their effects.

We aimed to create a training programme for adult education lecturers focused on the development of their social competences. Subsequently, we experimentally verified its efficiency. Our basis was the verified statement of Lábath and Smik (1991). They expressed their assumption that training has an impact not only on the outer dimension of interpersonal processes and relationships, but it also influences intra-psychological processes.

Personality variables combine with social variables, and their compatibility offers a balanced relationship. They are attributes of social competence which represents the ability of individuals to react in various interpersonal situations successfully. For this reason, the lecturer profession highly requires this feature.

2 Research question and hypotheses

Our primary research task was to answer the question: „What influence does our proposed training programme aimed at the development of lecturers` social competence have on chosen personality variables?
For the needs of our research, we formulated the following research hypotheses:
H_1: *We suppose that the social competence training will statistically significantly decrease the level of the variable „neuroticism" in the experimental group.*
H_2: *We suppose that the social competence training will statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „extraversion" in the experimental group.*
H_3: *We suppose that the social competence training will statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „openness to experience" in the experimental group.*
H_4: *We suppose that the social competence training will statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „kindness" in the experimental group.*
H_5: *We suppose that the social competence training will statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „conscientiousness" in the experimental group*

3 Research sample

Our research sample consisted of lecturers working in various institutions and facilities in Nitra region (the Regional Library of Karol Kmeťko in Nitra, Regional Tutorial Centre in Nitra, Regional Tutorial Centre in Levice and others). Forty-two educators of adults participated in our research, and we divided them into two experimental groups and two control groups. The first experimental group and the first control group had the same number of participants (N=12). Both second experimental and control groups also had the same number of participants (N=9). We carried out our proposed training programme of 80 lessons aimed at the development of social competence for a half year period. Contrary, in the control groups, we did not intervene at all.

Regarding the number of participants in the training (experimental) groups, we followed the recommendations of various experts dealing with the issue of personal cultivation with training. They say that efficient training group should not consist of more than 15 members (Gillernová, Štětovská, 2009, Hupková, 2010, Popelková, Zaťková, 2009).

4 Research methods

We designed our research in the form of an experiment with two experimental groups which participated in the social competence training, and two control groups which we did not stimulate intentionally.

We focused on the experimental verifying of the influence of the social competence training on chosen personality variables (N - neuroticism, E - extraversion, O - openness to experience, K -

kindness, C - conscientiousness). We measured these variables using a standardised multidimensional questionnaire NEO-FFI (NEO five - factor personality inventory) based on the five-factor personality model called „BigFive". The questionnaire authors are Costa and McCrae. Ruisel and Halama (2007) created the Slovak version of the questionnaire. The five - factor personality model is a structural model of personality features describing the whole personality. BigFive represents a minimal number of dimensions indispensable for an adequate personality description. It is possible to apply this questionnaire to the age group of 14 - 81 years. The questionnaire does not have any time limit (it usually takes 10 - 15 minutes). The administrated material consists of 60 items, and the tested person evaluated these items with a 5-point scale (0 - this does not apply to me at all, 1 - this applies to me only very little, 2 - this does and does not apply to me, 3 - this predominantly applies to me, 4 - this applies to me completely). The questionnaire evaluates the set basic personality dimensions - neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, kindness and conscientiousness (Ruisel, Halama, 2007).

We administrated the NEO-FFI questionnaire before the beginning of the social competence training, and also after this training finished (Table 1).

Table 1 Experimental plan

Research sample	1st phase	2nd phase	3rd phase
	pre-test	influence	post-test
	NEO-FFI		NEO-FFI
EG$_1$	yes	yes	yes
EG$_2$	yes	yes	yes
CG$_1$	yes	no	yes
CG$_2$	yes	no	yes

Legend: EG$_1$ - experimental group 1, EG$_2$ - experimental group 2, CG$_1$ - control group 1, CG$_2$ - control group 2, NEO-FFI - NEO five - factor personality inventory,

5 Research results and discussion

In Table 2, we mentioned the comparison of particular personality variables of the questionnaire NEO-FFI at the whole level of the experimental group. To achieve better statistical results and evaluation, we joined the experimental and control groups, and we analysed the results concerning one experimental group (EG-21) and one control group (CG-21). In experimental groups, which participated in the structured type of social competence training, we found out a statistically significant difference in all personality factors (N, E, O, K, C).

When comparing the measures before and after the social competence training, we noticed in all participants of the experimental group a statistically significant increase in values of the factors E (extraversion) and K (kindness) at the level of significance 0,01; as well as an increase in values of the variables O (openness to experience) and C (conscientiousness) at the level of significance 0,05. We also observed a decrease in values of the factor N (neuroticism) at the level of significance 0,01.

Table 2   Comparing of personality variables within the experimental group.

Experimental group							
		N	M	SD	t	df	p
N	before	21	21,24	7,49	4,806	20	**0,000**
	after	21	17,95	5,04			
E	before	21	28,43	3,97	-7,120	20	**0,000**
	after	21	32,14	4,30			
O	before	21	27,14	6,87	-2,355	20	**0,029**
	after	21	28,48	6,10			
K	before	21	32,24	5,75	-3,408	20	**0,003**
	after	21	34,62	4,76			
C	before	21	36,95	7,28	-2,726	20	**0,013**
	after	21	39,14	4,69			

Legend: N - number, M - mean, SD - standard deviation, t - value of t-test, df - degrees of freedom, p - level of significance, N - neuroticism, E - extraversion, O - openness to experience, K - kindness,C - conscientiousness.

In the experimental group, the measure after finishing the training programme confirmed a statistically significant decrease in values of the personality dimension N (neuroticism) up to 3,29 points when compared to the initial measuring. Based on this finding, we can say that *hypothesis H1, where we supposed a statistically significant decrease in the values of the variable „Neuroticism"with the social competence training, was confirmed.* Since in the first measuring the average levels were surprisingly higher in 2,34 points when compared to standard levels, we consider this significant decrease in values as a positive feature. The initial score in the dimension „Neuroticism" is characteristic with a higher emotivity, uncertainty, moodiness and increased nervousness. Individuals with a higher score sometimes have problems to control and modify their impulses adequately. They also cope with stress situations worse. The decrease of average values in this dimension points to emotionally more stable, balanced and more satisfying behaviour. People with a lower score in neuroticism are more self-confident and satisfied with themselves, which also influences their work performance. They can control themselves better, and they overcome obstacles by generating more efficient coping strategies. Neuroticism is one of the negative factors influencing the efficiency of interpersonal relationships which are essential in lecturers` work. We think that emotional stability is an indispensable assumption for the performance of this profession because lecturers` work includes high psychological requirements. According to Kollárik (1992), emotional stability is close to the emotional maturity. It is the emotional instability which often hinders success at work. Based on the significance of social competence, we can also mention a remarkable finding of Prospěchová, Blížkovská (2003). They observed a mutual relationship of personality characteristic features and social competence with a sample of 91 respondents, using the BigFive questionnaire. Their research results pointed to the correlation between personality features and social competence as meaning that the main predictors of social competence are extraversion and a low level of neuroticism.

The increase in values in the mentioned personality dimensions (E, O, K, C) indicates *the shift of behaviour towards more adaptive forms.*

We found out the most significant shift in values increased in 3,71 points in the personality variable E – extraversion when we compared the input and output measures in the experimental group. In this way, *we could confirm the hypothesis H2 where we supposed that, with the social competence training, there would be a statistically significant increase in the level of the variable „extraversion" in the experimental group.* We can interpret a higher score as a shift towards more active, cooperative and social behaviour. Sociability is one component of extraversion, and it reflects in a positive relationship to other people and a strong preference of society. Extravert people show an increased interest in people in the outer world; they are satisfied, optimistic and communicative. For this reason, they are very popular in society. Higher extraversion often connects with the ability to lead other people. These individuals tend to have logical thinking; they are practical, objective and creative in looking for possible solutions and new approaches in task fulfilling. They are usually realistic, and they suppress intuition. At the same time, they act emotionally what often leads to interpersonal conflicts they try to solve assertively. Barrick, Mount (2005) found out that extraversion positively predicts performance and success in professions with a dominant interpersonal contact. The profession of a lecturer in adult education belongs to these professions as well. In their research, Mahony, Statson (2005) included 192 students, and they concluded that extraversion is a personality factor for expressing relationships. According to Judge et al. (1999), extraversion predicts, to the most considerable extent possible, leadership, management and organising what usually belongs to the job

description of lecturers. In the area of psychological health, people perceive extraversion positively; it predicts general life satisfaction and level of happiness (Hayes, Joseph, 2003). A lower score in neuroticism (emotional stability) and a higher score in extraversion are required to achieve work satisfaction at various work positions (Roberts, 2001). Satisfaction with work is a decisive factor for lecturers because there is a typical turnover of staff in this profession.

In the final measuring of the participants from the experimental group after finishing the training, we recorded a statistically significant increase (in 1,34 points) in the average levels in the personality scale O - openness to experience. From the facts mentioned above, it is evident that the *hypothesis H3, where we supposed that the social competence training would statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „openness to experience", was confirmed.* For this reason, we can talk about more adaptive forms of behaviour such as unconventional and creative behaviour which is identified mainly with curiosity. Open individuals are more curious about the outer as well as the inner world, and they have more experience in their lives. They tend to look for and bring new ideas and unconventional values. They often fulfil their tasks originally and creatively. Openness is mainly related to divergent thinking which correlates with creativity. Open individuals creatively approach tasks what is another positive finding because the work of lecturers has high requirements on creativity. In his research, Schwarz (2012) found out that openness to experience plays a significant role in the development of competences, where people obtain new knowledge and experience, e.g. in differently focused types of training. These workers are willing to work on the development of their competences and personalities. 95% of agreeing answers confirmed this tendency in the question about the willingness of participants to strengthen their social competence. We think that this desire of participants to strengthen their abilities, skills and competences is highly beneficial for this profession because there increases the need for continuous education and self-development of these workers together with higher requirements on the performance of this profession.

In the second measuring of the personality variable K (kindness), we observed a statistically significant increase in average values in 2,38 points in comparison to the first measuring. This fact *confirmed the hypothesis H4 where we supposed that the social competence training would statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „Kindness".* Kindness is a dimension with interpersonal tendencies. A higher score in this factor (K) indicates a shift towards tolerant, respectful and sensible behaviour. Ruisel, Halama (2007) say that the factor of kindness estimates the individual`s interpersonal orientation. Kind individuals try to have positive and helpful relationships with other people at work. In general, people think that individuals with higher kindness are more credible, trustful, altruistic, socially desirable, as well as psychologically more healthy. They are indispensable mainly in the work environment, which requires continuous team cooperation. According to Barrick, Mount (2005), kindness also predicts higher performance in teamwork what is valid for lecturers` work as well. Weisová, Suss (2007) think that if we want to take social and personal characteristic features into account, we should focus on extraversion and kindness. These factors represent the crucial features enabling an individual to involve others. At the same time, they allow other people to involve this individual what is an assumption for the cooperation. Kind people can adapt to various personal and work conditions and activities more efficiently. This feature is very required because lecturer`s work represents the whole spectre of various activities.

We noticed a significant difference in the final measuring of the personality variable C (conscientiousness) in the increased score in 2,19 points when we compared the obtained results with the values in the initial measuring. Based on this finding, we can *confirm the hypothesis H5 where we supposed that the social competence training would statistically significantly increase the level of the variable „conscientiousness" in the experimental group.* We can interpret the increase of the given value in this

factor (C) as a behaviour with characteristic features such as ambition, responsibility and reliability. These individuals consider themselves as more intelligent. This attitude reflects in successful fulfilling of their tasks and duties. Barrick, Mount (2005) focused on finding the relationship between personality dimensions (N, E, O, K, C) and work performance in their research. They found out that higher values of conscientiousness are related to more consistent fulfilling of tasks, general work performance and efficiency at various work positions. Conscientious people are responsible for their tasks and, therefore, they are more successful at work (Kollárik, 1992). One feature of higher conscientiousness is also the ability to resist impulses and to regulate their desires. This self-control has an impact on more operational planning, organising and fulfilling of the set aims. Out of all factors, we can consider conscientiousness the most reliable criterium of work performance. Conscientiousness predicts longterm satisfaction in the career, and it is related to the general psychological well-being (Hayes, Joseph, 2003, Judge et al., 1999). Judge et al. (1999) found out that emotional stability and conscientiousness have a high correlation with performance motivation. We think that the assumption of every good performance is determined not only by competences and requirements but also by inner motivation.

In Table 3, we mention results of comparing particular personality variables from the NEO-FFI questionnaire at the whole level of the control group where we also carried out two measures with the absence of the training intervention.

When we compared the initial and final measuring by the participants of the control group, we surprisingly recorded a statistically significant decrease of the personality variable C (conscientiousness) at the level of significance 0,02. We did not notice any statistically significant difference in the rest observed dimensions when we compared both measures in the control group.

Despite our expectations, in the final measure of the personality variable C - conscientiousness, we recorded a statistically significant decrease in average values in 1,72 points in the control group. These unexpected results could be the effects of the influence of various factors which we cannot identify. A lower score in conscientiousness indicates a shift to careless, non-systematic and non-organised behaviour. However, in the initial measuring, the control group achieved 1,29 points more than it was the average score when we compared these results with the standardised values (34,57), what means a difference of only 0,43 points between the decrease of the final values and the set standard.

Table 3   Comparing of personality variables in the control group

Control group						
		N	M	SD	t	df	p
N	before	21	22,24	8,54	-1,34	20	0,195
	after	21	23,05	7,16			
E	before	21	28,05	6,90	1,301	20	0,208
	after	21	27,10	6,74			
O	before	21	26,24	4,91	1,347	20	0,193
	after	21	25,14	4,43			
K	before	21	31,38	6,25	-0,087	20	0,932
	after	21	31,43	6,90			
C	before	21	35,86	7,09	2,166	20	**0,043**
	after	21	34,19	6,55			

Legend: N - number, M - mean, SD - standard deviation, t - value of t-test, df - degrees of freedom, p - level of significance, N - neuroticism, E - extraversion, O - openness to experience, K - kindness, C - conscientiousness.

We measured significant differences in particular personality variables in the experimental group. Despite the obtained results, we think it is crucial to draw attention to the fact that there is a controversy related to their stability versus instability in the approach to the personality and its features (Costa, McCrae,

1994). Stability of personality changes belongs to the problematic areas in personality psychology in theoretical and empirical observation. Results of several studies point to significant stability of personality features in time (Harris, Brett, Johnson, Deary, 2016). Based on our findings, as well as on the findings of Popelková, Solárová, Zaťková (2003) who carried out similar research, we concluded that it is possible to achieve personality changes with intentional and longterm stimulation. However, there remains questionable the stability of these changes in time. Therefore, in the future experiments of this type, we would recommend repeating these measures with at least a half-year period after the end of the training. Popelková, Zaťková (2009), within their research, carried out measures one year after the intervention programme finished. Out of all personality factors, they found out a statistically significant difference in the neuroticism at the level of significance 0,05 (a lower level of longterm effect). Regarding the stability of changes in time, Popelková, Zaťková (2009) once again confirmed the results about the high stability of personality variables. Similarly, Blatný, Urbánek (2004) confirmed the high stability of personality variables with their research. They explain this fact with high stability of biological bases for neuroticism and extraversion, which express the basal personality dispositions in the area of emotionality and general personality orientation.

6 Conclusion

Our article dealt with the interpretation of partial results of our research, where we experimentally verified the influence of our proposed training programme aimed at the development of lecturers` social competence. We dare to say that social competence is lecturers` primary competence. Thanks to this competence, lecturers can successfully and efficiently carry our their various work activities.

The results of our research confirmed our assumptions about the influence of the social competence training on personality variables which participate in successful and efficient acting of an individual in the incessantly changing social environment. It is possible to interpret these findings as a shift in the behaviour of participants to more adaptive forms which enable them to fulfil their social and work roles better.

Even though it is not possible to generalise our research results for the whole population nor the whole group of lecturers in adult education, we can talk about the efficiency of our training programme based on our findings.

It is possible to maintain achieved positive changes in intrapersonal variables with an intentional stimulation in the form of training, which is part of lifelong education. Social competence training has reasonably become a significant area of personality development in the system of lifelong education. This high-quality training can efficiently support acting of individuals in the society, achieving their personal and work objectives, as well as the quality of their lives (Müller de Morais, Rapsová, 2019). Training programmes offer many longterm advantages not only for the participants but also for their social environment. Training extends the possibilities of education, cooperation and help to other people. It also contributes to personality development, supporting self-education and self-improvement together with responsible planning of their lives. Similarly to Praško, Možný, Šlepecký (2007) and Segrin (2000), we think that training programmes of this type also fulfil a preventive role because prevention is not only about preventing mental health problems, but also about strengthening of competences.

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