

Impact of Status (Olympic Athletes and Non-Athletes) on Emotional Competence during Confinement: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to compare the emotional competences of Tunisian Olympic athletes and those of non-athletes. A sample of 63 students (30 athletes and 33 non-athletes) (between 14 and 26 years of age, $ET = 3926$), has been selected. All subjects have completed the French version of the Emotional Competences Profile “ECP”. The reliability test has shown a satisfactory internal consistency of the scale ($\text{Alpha} = 0.739$). The student's t-test that consists of comparing the averages of the two independent samples revealed the existence of a significant difference in the overall emotional competence score ($t_{61} = 2036$, $p = 0.046^{**} 0.05$). Thus, it could be said that the athletes' emotional competences enable them to better adapt to stressful situations. Therefore, they are more likely to control their emotions, their own understanding and those of others. On the other hand, they are able to easily manage their daily stress and regulate their relationships with others. The results of our studies allow us not only to test our hypothesis but also to determine the relationship between emotional competences and the practice of sport.

Keywords

Emotional Competences, Athletes, Non-Athletes, Containment

1. Introduction

Do athletes differ from non-athletes with regard to the impact of their emotional capacities during the containment's period? The aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of remote training sessions in order to maximize the emotional ca-

capacities associated with during containment. Emotional intelligence, a generic term for emotional competences can be defined as “the skill to perceive and express emotions, to integrate them in order to facilitate thinking, to understand and reason with emotions as well as to regulate them in one self and in the others” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). We could, therefore, say that emotional competence is an acquired skill based on emotional intelligence that leads to outstanding performances in the workplace. Emotional competences involve the dimensions of identifying one’s own emotions and those of the others, understanding, expressing, listening to, regulating and using them.

The emotional competences’ design as it was outlined in some literature is manifested in methods called “personal development”. The same methods are situated at the frontier of the humanist current and in the pursuit of performance (Rogers, 1966). Emotional Competence (EC) has been the focus of growing attention from both the general public and the scientific community. Sometimes, better known as Emotional Intelligence (EI), this concept introduces reference to the way, individuals process intrapersonal or interpersonal emotional information (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). To find out more specifically, it is a matter of how an individual identifies, expresses, understands, regulates and uses his or her emotions and those of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mikolajczak, 2009). It must be emphasized that, we prefer the term “Emotional Competence” (EC) to that of “Emotional Intelligence” (EI) because it corresponds to recent results (Nelis et al., 2011), Kotsou, Nelis, Grégoire, & Mikolajczak (2011) show that these competences, unlike intelligence, can be taught and learned. Individual differences related to emotions have been conceptualized as abilities (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000), personality traits (Petrides & Furnham, 2001) or a mixture of both. This has led to different and important lines of research and to some debates concerning the status of individual differences and emotions as traits (best assessed by personality tests) or abilities (best assessed by intelligence type tests).

Emotional Competence (EC) plays a key role in the demonstration of human behavior in which one challenges different emotional situations, responding to one’s needs. This includes the necessary efforts to maintain harmonious relationships with one’s environment. EC refers to individual difference in order to identify, understand, express, regulate and use one’s own emotions and those of the others (Brasseur et al., 2013). Mikolajczak (2009) proposes a three-leveled CE that includes knowledge, abilities and related to emotions dispositions. An individual’s CE level implies that he or she has a sufficient knowledge to manage interpersonal conflicts through the controlled use of emotions as they apply to real-life situation. The level of ability associated with emotions does not depend on what people know but on what they are able to do. Substantial studies have established the importance of EC; Indeed, EC seems to influence most crucial spheres of life such as psychological well-being, physical health, social relationships and professional success. Psychologically, higher EC is for example asso-

ciated with higher self-esteem, greater well-being and better life satisfaction (Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008; Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002), and a decreased risk of developing psychological disorders or burnout (Mikolajczak, Menil, & Luminet, 2007). This is not surprising in a meta-analysis because EC decreases the neuro-endocrine reactivity to stress and reduces the probability of adopting unhealthy behaviors such smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and reckless driving (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Trinidad & Johnson, 2002). In spite of the differences between the authors and their definitions, Mikolajczak, is developing a relative consensus out of the various works, five major emotional competences which are:

- 1) Identification which makes it possible to identify one's own emotions and the emotions of the others;
- 2) Understanding where it is possible to understand the causes and consequences of one's own and others' emotions;
- 3) Expression that allows you to express your emotions in a socially acceptable way and at the same time allows the others to express theirs, too;
- 4) Regulation that helps you managing your own stress and emotions and those of the others;
- 5) Use that enables the use of one's emotions and those of the others to increase their efficiency.

The aim of this study is to determine the differences between the emotional competences of athletes and non-athletes with regard to their interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional competences.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

In accordance with the Code of Ethics of the psychological association, the participants involved in our research were volunteers and handed in their informed consent. The sample is composed of $N = 30$ (Tunisian athletes) and $N = 33$ (non-athletes), aged (between 14 and 26 years, $ET = 3926$).

2.2. Measurements

All subjects have completed the French version of the "Emotional Competence Profile" ECP (Brasseur et al., 2013). A preliminary validation of the Arabic version of ECP questionnaire among Tunisian sports and non-sports teenagers proved that the Arab World could use the EPC questionnaire as a valid and reliable instrument. The scale consisted of 50 items rated on five-point scale, ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree) including two sub-scales of second order: intrapersonal CE and interpersonal CE. Each second order factor involves five first-order sub-scales: intrapersonal EC includes identifying, understanding, expressing, regulating and using one's own emotions while interpersonal EC incorporates identifying, understanding, listening, regulating and the emotions of the others. Cronbach's alphas concerning intrapersonal and interpersonal EC were

in the order of 0.80, 0.84 for the total sample which would suggest an adequate internal consistency.

2.3. Procedures

Participants were asked to provide demographic information such as age, gender, whether they practiced any sport and in which sport discipline they were primarily involved. Both samples, the experimental group, “Tunisian sportsmen” and the group of students have been recruited on the database of the network and have completed the ECP questionnaire.

In the current research, ECP (Brasseur et al., 2013) has been used to assess EC. Participants answered all the 50 items using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire (ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The inventory was assigned for assessing the five core competences, namely, Identification (I), Understanding (U), Expression (E), Regulating (R) and Emotion Use (U), separately and distinctly for oneself and for the others’ emotions. In further details, the assessment tool, was designed to quantitatively and separately study intrapersonal relationships, emotional competences (*i.e.*, competences related to one’s own emotions) and interpersonal emotional competences (or competences related to the others’ emotions). In addition, The ECP produces an overall score associated with the overall level of emotional competence. Indeed, it has shown a satisfactory discriminant and convergent validity (Brasseur et al., 2013). The mental coaching sessions spread over six weeks, from mid-March to the end of April, 2020, and had the following content:

- 1) Video sessions for psychological support accompanied by imagery exercises;
- 2) Breath control using the Cardiac Coherence method in order to manage containment stress;
- 3) Exchanges between groups of athletes, reporting testimonies concerning their containment’s experiences;
- 4) Exchange photos and videos on home activities and household chores.

2.4. Statistical Analyses

All statistical analyses have been carried out using the commercial software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 26.0, IBM, Chicago, IL, USA). The value data of $p < 0.05$ were regarded as statistically significant.

3. Results

The general descriptive characteristics of each item and sub-scale of the ECP are given in **Table 1** and **Table 2**. The comparison of the two sports and non sport groups is shown in **Figure 1**. The reliability statistics are presented in **Table 2**.

Here, we point out that the coefficient value is 0.739, which is considered excellent since it exceeds the minimum required threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally,

1978). This tag, being arbitrary, is widely accepted by the scientific community. Accordingly, we would actually say that we obtain for this 50 item scale a satisfactory internal consistency.

The t-test analyses for interpersonal and intrapersonal subscales are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Groups	Measures	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Variance (n)	Standard deviation (n)
Athlete N = 30	Identifying my emotions	10,000	22,000	15,433	11,179	3343
	Identifying other people's emotions	5000	22,000	16,067	14,129	3759
	Understanding my emotions	7000	21,000	14,500	14,383	3793
	Understanding of other people's emotions	6000	21,000	15,633	10,699	3271
	Expressing my emotions	9000	23,000	15,467	9382	3063
	Listening to the emotions of others	10,000	23,000	15,667	12,156	3486
	Regulating my emotions	8000	22,000	15,033	12,766	3573
	Regulation of other people's emotions	8000	23,000	15,167	13,339	3652
	Using my emotions	6000	21,000	15,233	11,312	3363
	Using other people's emotions	10,000	25,000	15,567	10,246	3201
	Intrapersonal CE	9600	19,800	15,133	5478	2341
	Interpersonal CE	8800	21,200	15,620	5878	2425
	Total CE score	10,500	19,200	15,377	4426	2104
Non-athlete N = 30	Identifying my emotions	7000	22,000	14,848	11,644	3412
	Identifying other people's emotions	7000	22,000	14,212	11,500	3391
	Understanding my emotions	6000	21,000	14,758	12,487	3534
	Understanding of other people's emotions	9000	20,000	14,515	8674	2945
	Expressing my emotions	8000	21,000	13,152	8371	2893
	Listening to the emotions of others	10,000	24,000	15,212	12,713	3565
	Regulating my emotions	9000	20,000	14,697	7726	2780
	Regulation of other people's emotions	6000	20,000	14,364	9019	3003
	Using my emotions	8000	22,000	14,212	14,470	3804
	Using other people's emotions	9000	24,000	14,273	13,471	3670
	Intrapersonal CE	10,600	17,600	14,333	3037	1743
	Interpersonal CE	10,400	18,600	14,515	3377	1838
	Total CE score	10,600	17,900	14,424	2334	1528

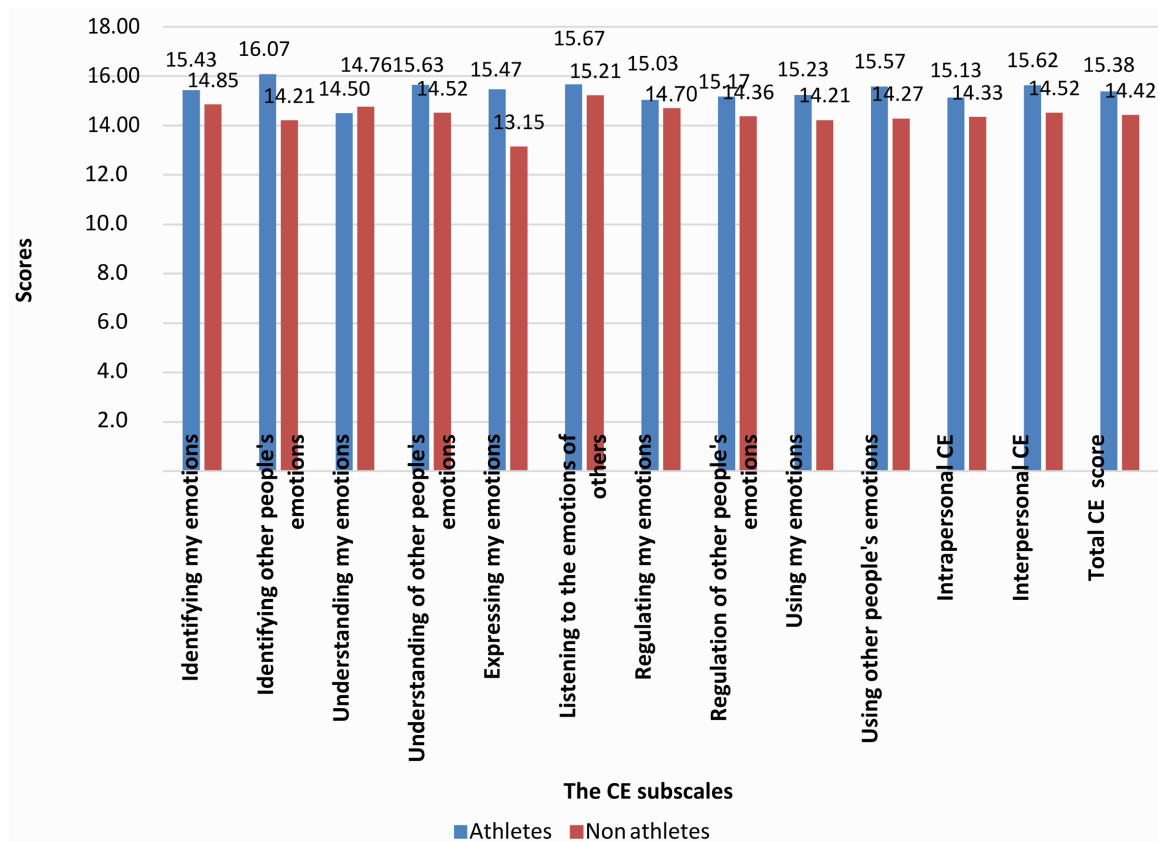


Figure 1. Histogram of non elite and elite means ± SD.

Table 2. Reliability statistics.

Cronbach alpha	Number of items
0.739	50

Table 3. Student's t-test of both athletic and non-athletic groups (independent samples test).

	Levene's test for equality of variances				t-test for equality of means													
	F	Sig.	t	ddl	Sig. (bilateral)	Average difference	Difference in standard error	Confidence interval of the difference at 95%.										
								Lower	Superior									
Identifying my emotions	0.016	0.899	0.675	61.000	0.502	0.585	0.866	-1.148	2.317									
Identifying other people's emotions	0.245	0.623	2.026	61.000	0.047	1.855	0.915	0.024	3.685									
Understanding my emotions	0.101	0.752	-0.275	61.000	0.785	-0.258	0.938	-2.133	1.618									
Understanding the emotions of others										0.001	0.977	1.405	61.000	0.165	1.118	0.796	-0.473	2.710
Expressing my emotions										0.062	0.804	3.035	61.000	0.004	2.315	0.763	0.790	3.840

Continued

Listening to other people's emotions	0.053	0.819	0.503	61.000	0.617	0.455	0.904	-1.354	2.263
Regulating my emotions	4.004	0.050	0.412	61.000	0.682	0.336	0.816	-1.295	1.968
Regulation of other people's emotions	2.303	0.134	0.941	61.000	0.350	0.803	0.853	-0.903	2.509
Using my emotions	0.637	0.428	1.106	61.000	0.273	1.021	0.923	-0.825	2.867
Using other people's emotions	0.756	0.388	1.461	61.000	0.149	1.294	0.886	-0.477	3.065
Intrapersonal EC	2.589	0.113	1.589	61.000	0.117	0.833	0.524	-0.215	1.882
Interpersonal EC	1.392	0.243	2.016	61.000	0.048	1.105	0.548	0.009	2.201
Total EC score	2.882	0.095	2.036	61.000	0.046	0.952	0.468	0.017	1.888

Values in bold have significance levels $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Discussion

Our purpose, in this study, is to examine the emotional competences of athletes and their peers. The findings have brought strong support for the key research question: do athletes differ from non-athletes with regard to the impact of their emotional competences during the period of containment?

More specifically, significant discrepancies have been observed in the measurement. The EC play a key role in sport sciences. The studies carried out to date have yielded contrasting results. This document provides data concerning the questionnaire's properties: "Emotional Competence Profile" (ECP) developed by Brasseur et al. (2013), and administered to a sample of 30 Tunisian athletes and 33 non-athletes. However, from an applied sport psychological perspective, very few studies have explored the theoretical differences between athletes and non-athletes in terms of emotional competences, securing contradictory or mitigated evidences. Pasand (2010), for example, found no difference between athletes and non-athletes in terms of EI, whereas Sohrabi, Garajeh, & Mohammadi (2011) discovered statistically significant differences. These results confirm both the link between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal EC dimensions and their relative independence. They support the relevance of the assessment of the two dimensions, separately. The convenience of distinguishing the two dimensions is illustrated in a recent study concerning talented students by Brasseur & Grégoire (Under preparation).

The use of ECP allowed reinforcing the results obtained previously, and more specifically, showing some specificity in EC profile of talented students. In comparison to controls, they had lower intrapersonal EC and higher interpersonal EC (while they find it difficult to identify, express and understand their emotions, they are particularly talented at regulating and using others' emotions). These results which are corroborated are interesting both theoretically and practically (by showing asymmetries in the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal EC)

(by suggesting areas for improvement).

Recent studies have shown that it is possible to develop ECs even at adulthood. The clinical availability of a tool that details an individual's EC Profile and that helps us to find out the targeted purpose, seems to be relevant. From the same perspective, a meta-analysis developed by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger (2011) and based on a sample of 213 studies has shown statistically positive effects, six months after an intervention in the form of SEL (Social Emotional Learning). These interventions were destined to improve students' social and emotional competences. Indeed, the authors have observed improvements in their social behavior, academic performances, positive impacts on competences and social and emotional attitudes. On the hand, and on the basis that the primary function of emotional competences is to anticipate and adapt to evolving situations According to these results, athletes with high level of emotional competences, usually better anticipate the emotional consequences of a risk, which would allow them to make a better decision with less risk. It would also appear that athletes in team games differ from those in individual sports (The expression of emotional skills among individual and team sports male athletes, 2018) in that they develop a better self-awareness and the ability of self-regulation. These competences may therefore be highly required for adapting to stress and to situations of uncertainty.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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