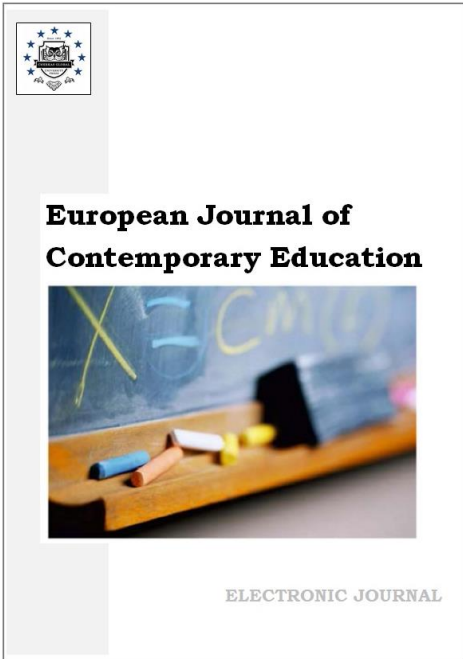




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## **Theoretical Foundations for Education of Positive Behavior Skills Among Young Athletes: A Qualitative Study**

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### **Abstract**

The increase in aggressiveness and disrespect to their peers in physically active teenagers and adolescents has become a major topic in the academic world. Risky behavior in teenagers has been attributed to biological, psychological and social factors. Therefore, it is essential to pay much attention to educational programs that develop a person's physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects. It has been concluded that positive behavior skills education may be beneficial in personality development. However, there are not many educational programs based on the current theoretical knowledge about the development of positive behavior skills. In addition to this, no educational program, that is based on the positive behavior skills, has been applied in the education of young sportspeople. The aim of our qualitative study was to analyze the theoretical foundations for education of positive behavior skills among young athletes. This qualitative study is based on a directed content analysis strategy. The methods used in the course of this study are analysis of academic literature, synthesis, summarizing, grouping and comparing. It has been highlighted that the construct of positive behavior skills comprises positive personal, positive social and positive emotional skills, that create a multi-layered structural model of positive behavior skills. The types of positive personal, positive social and positive emotional behavior skills are crucial when putting together educational programs for young sportspeople and their well-being. Concluding the results of our theoretical analysis, positive social, positive personal and positive emotional skills should be prioritized in educational programs that develop young athletes' positive behavior skills.

**Keywords:** skills education, positive behavior skills, personal skills, social skills, emotional skills, young athletes.

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## 1. Introduction

During the teenage years, our personalities go through fast and important changes. We develop biologically, psychologically and socially and we learn to live independently. The psychosocial part of the development process is strongly influenced by the interaction between the development in earlier stages of life and the biological, social and cultural factors that happen during the teenage years (Salavera et al., 2017). A teenager has to become an independent adult by finding their identity and building strong relationships with their peers during a time when their social life is unstable and fast-changing (Blakemore, 2018).

The increase in aggressiveness and disrespect to their peers among professional and not professional adolescent sportspeople has become a major topic discussed widely not only in social media but also in the academic world (Cristello et al., 2020; Jewett et al., 2020; Mays, Thompson, 2009; Whitley et al., 2019). The competitiveness routinely observed in sports can create social exclusion (Cote, Hancock, 2014), disrupt close relationships, stimulate social division and even social delinquency among teenagers and adolescents (Ferreira et al., 2007; Pabayo et al., 2014; Whitley et al., 2019). Waid and Urich (2020) underline biological, psychological and social factors that are linked to risky behavior in teenagers. Biological factors comprise physical growth and pubescence, social factors include social and emotional changes, while psychological factors include changes in identity and self-control (Chick, 2015; Waid, Urich, 2020). Educational programs based on physical, emotional, social and identity development are essential when evaluating these factors (Bailey, 2006; Whitley et al., 2019). Hemphill et al. (2019) suggests that education in positive behavior skills may be beneficial for the emotional, social and cognitive development. It is clear that the current sports-based programs focus on physical well-being. However, recently more attention has been drawn to the social and emotional development as well (Akelaitis, 2017; Kochanek, Erickson, 2020). Unfortunately, there is a limited number of educational programs that are based on integrated skills development as opposed to focusing on either social or emotional skills. In addition to this, no educational program, that is based on the positive behavior skills, has been applied in the education of young sportspeople. Therefore, this paper aims to find out what positive behavior skills should be the base of education programs for young athletes.

**Purpose of the present study:** to analyze the theoretical foundations of the development of positive behavior skills in young sportspeople.

### Aims of the study:

1. To analyze existing models of positive behavior skills development.
2. To substantiate the complex of the positive behavior skills that could be used as the basis of an educational program for young athletes.

## 2. Methods

**Research strategy and logic.** The qualitative study is based on a directed content analysis strategy that is an independent methodological strategy. Qualitative directed content analysis (in our case key concepts and definitions analysis) means in a broad sense interpretation and generalization of written data. Content analysis using a directed approach is guided by a structured process. Using existing theory or prior research, researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories (Elo, Kyngäs, 2008). Next, operational definitions for each category are determined using the theory. After the analysis, new models, concepts or categories for the research objects are found to describe.

**The research methods** used in the course of this study are analysis of scientific literature, synthesis, summarizing, grouping and comparing.

## 3. Results

In scientific literature, positive behavior skills are often the objective of research in positive behavior paradigm in youth (Chartier et al., 2021; Deb, 2018; Deutsch, 2017; Hemphill et al., 2019; Holt et al., 2020; Lerner, 2017). Pearson et al. (2021) concludes that positive behavior skills are the ability to create one's well-being while interacting with people or groups of people under diverse environmental and cultural circumstances. Often the academic literature on positive behavior development in youth focuses on life skills that can be observed in various life scenarios. For example, Holt et al. (2020) suggests that positive behavior skills comprise transferable

personal and social life skills. Hemphill et al. (2019), on the other hand, identifies the development of social, emotional and personal skills as the subject of the positive behavior development research. This is supported by other authors (Holt et al., 2020; Napolitano et al., 2021; Soto et al., 2021; Weis, Wiese, 2009), who consider these skills necessary when developing strong, positive social relations and learning to control one’s emotions and behavior. This highlights the necessity to develop positive personal skills as part of the set of positive skills oriented to the changes in self-cognition and self-control during the teenage years.

Sin, Jone and Petocz (2007) state that the terms *personal skills* and *interpersonal skill* are interchangeable as they both mean the ability to control oneself or being in unison with oneself. This is well illustrated in the variety of the definitions of *personal skills* (Table 1). Geisinger (2016) describes personal skills as a set of skills that helps develop a positive relationship with one’s thoughts. Kolb and Handley-Maxwell (2003) comment that positive behavior skills are those that help develop one’s identity, being in a positive relationship with oneself. To summarize, personal skills are positive personal skills. Personal skills are related to the development of one’s identity (Widjaja, Saragih 2018). The development of personal skills is focused on consciousness, self-confidence, positive interpersonal communication (prosocial behavior) and the ability to take responsibility (Prajapati et al., 2017). According to Sambaiah and Aneel (2016), personal skills are considered essential for a healthy relationship with oneself that, in turn, in means a better relationship with others.

**Table 1.** Definitions of personal skills

Definition	Author
The ability to perceive and control oneself.	Bar-on, 1997
The ability to reflect on oneself.	Caena, Punie, 2019
The ability and motivation to react to oneself in a positive way in the context of surrounding social systems.	Fetro et al., 2010
The ability to focus one’s state of mind on an important goal.	Fitzsimons, Bargh, 2004
Skills that develop a positive relationship with one’s thoughts.	Geisinger, 2016
The ability to change, maintain and divert one’s behavior in order to achieve an important goal.	Ilkowska, Engle 2010
The ability to control oneself.	Purwoastuti et al., 2015
The skills related to the relationship to oneself.	Raudeliūnaitė, 2007

There are multiple personal skills models and therefore the classification of personal skills varies. It is important to note that personal skills are similar to social skills in the sense that they both are linked to diverse life situations. This is the reason for a variety of personal skills types (Table 2). Nevertheless, there has been no consensus on a universal personal skills model definition in the current academic literature. The academic community is only beginning to discuss the importance of positive personal skills in the context of the development of positive behavior skills.

**Table 2.** Types of personal skills

Author	Types of personal skills
Chalkiadaki, 2018	Self-improvement Autonomy Creative skills Critical thinking skills Problem-solving skills Self-control Ability to adapt
Fetro et al., 2010	Building a relationship with oneself Building relationships with others Overcoming skills Resolution skills

Gammie et al., 2002	Writing curriculum vitae Ability to give interviews Ability to look for a job Time management skills Teamwork skills Public speaking skills
Griffin et al., 2001	Decision making skills Self-control skills Self-regulation skills
Sunarto, 2015	Being proactive Being ethical/fair Critical thinking skills Ability to learn Ability to commit Motivation Enthusiasm Creativity

Given the variety and diversity of these definitions, it has not been established what personal skills are the most important in developing positive behavior skills in youth. The academic papers analyzed over the course of this research highlight three important personal skills that may be the most significant when developing positive behavior.

Habashi, Graziano and Hoover (2016) conclude that prosocial behavior skills are some of the positive personal skills due to being closely linked to individual differences (individual relations) that determine the manifestation of different prosocial behavior. The ability to take responsibility is also one of the positive personal skills constructs (Filiz, Demirham, 2019; Newman, 2020; Smithikrai et al., 2015). Asumeng (2014) states that positive personal skills must also include a positive self-evaluation that allows one to make positive assumptions about oneself. We therefore presume that positive personal skills comprise prosocial behavior, the ability to take responsibility and positive self-evaluation.

Another positive behavior skillset is positive social skills. The academic community has been discussing social skills for a long time. However, there has not been one universal definition of social skills (Nangle et al., 2020). Table 3 illustrates a variety of social skills definitions encountered in various papers. They highlight two main parts of social skills: communication and relation to others. While these definitions differ, there is a certain agreement regarding the education of social skills. Social skills constitute learned behaviors that involve initiated behavior and its feedback when communicating with others (Little et al., 2017). In short, social skills are the skills that enable individuals to function competently in various social tasks (Cook et al., 2008). Lawhon and Lawhon (2000) indicate that well-developed social skills are the reason behind a positive experience when communicating with others. In short, we may say that the best way to define social skills is ‘the ability to interact in socially acceptable ways’ (Šniras, 2005) because this definition includes the most frequently mentioned parts of the definition of social skills, in addition to reflecting the components of the positive behavior development paradigm that are highlighted when creating positive, long-lasting relationships between youngsters and adults and teaching adolescents to use social skills in their communities (Holt et al., 2020; Lerner, 2004).

**Table 3.** Definitions of social skills

Definition	Author
Learned behaviors that enable individuals to function competently in various social tasks.	Cook et al., 2008
Social behaviors valued in a given culture that increase the likelihood of favorable results for the individual, their group and the community, and can contribute to a socially competent performance in tasks related to interpersonal skills.	Del Prette, Del Prette, 2021

Category of socially accepted behaviors that are necessary for social competences.	Del Prette, Del Prette, 2021
Skills that help individuals initiate and maintain relationships, develop friendships and be accepted by their peers.	Gresham et al., 2006.
Culturally-linked behavior learned during communication with peers and adults.	Ladd, 2005
Ability to interact in socially accepted ways.	Šniras, 2005

The definitions of social skills and social competences are often used interchangeably. They are linked but have different models (Nangle et al., 2020). Social skills are part of social competences and are considered essential when developing the ability to react appropriately in social situations. Competences are the process of evaluation, while skills are necessary to function competently in various social tasks. The definition of social competences is important in order to comprehend interpersonal relationships. The term *social competences* is the evaluation of behavior and interpersonal communication, which is why Del Prette and Del Prette (2021) believe the definition of social competences should include 3 aspects: the recognition of one’s behavior (thoughts, feelings, actions) evaluated during an interpersonal task; matching one’s personal goals that are appropriate in a particular situation and culture; guaranteeing positive results when measured along instrumental and ethical criteria.

There has also been no consensus as to what social skills are the main ones, partially because it is often difficult to distinguish the main skills from the manifestations of social competences (Junge et al., 2020).

**Table 4.** Types of social skills

Author	Types of social skills
Del Prette, Del Prette, 2021	Communication skills Active citizenship Friendliness and ability to maintain friendships Empathy Ability to convince Showing solidarity Conflict management and interpersonal problem solving Love and intimacy Team management skills Public speaking skills
Nangle, 2020	Ability to communicate Ability to control emotions Cognition Problem solving skills
Gresham et al., 2011	Cooperation skills Perseverance Empathy Self-control Ability to take responsibility
Johnston et al., 2013	Communication skills Conflict resolution skills Cooperation skills Leadership skills
Junge et al., 2020	Social coding skills Social problem-solving skills Ability to control emotions Communication skills Empathy

Table 4 illustrates the variety and diversity of social skills that are needed to be considered socially competent. It is clear that there is no consensus on the main skills that comprise social competency. However, the social skills suggested by Gresham et al. (2011) are most commonly used in research papers. These social skills are: cooperation skills, perseverance, empathy, self-control and ability to take responsibility (Gresham et al., 2011). The social skills types that Elliott, Frey and Davies (2015) proposed – cooperation skills, perseverance, empathy, self-control, social control, the ability to take responsibility and commit – are frequently chosen and used in education programs. Little et al. (2017) comment that due to practical reasons social skills are conceptualized using evaluation tools that enable accurate measurement. Therefore, the skills that Gresham et al. (2011) highlight can be measured in a reliable way using those evaluation tools (Gresham, Elliott, 1990). We conclude that positive social skills comprise the skills mentioned in the Gesham et al. (2011) model.

The last positive behavior skills construct is emotional skills. As with the definitions of personal and social skills, the definition of emotional skills has not been agreed upon (Salokivi et al., 2021). The diversity of definitions is shown in Table 5. Nevertheless, all of these definitions share certain features: the ability to understand (comprehend) emotions, the ability to evaluate emotions, the ability to express emotions, the ability to use the information about emotions in order to control one's behavior or thought process, the ability to control emotions. These features reflect abilities (skills). We can summarize those positive emotional skills are 'the ability to control one's emotions and other people's emotions that allows one to achieve communication goals and maintain positive relationships with other people' (Legkauskas, 2012). This definition matches one of the components of the positive behavior development in youth paradigm linked to positive and long-term relationships between youngsters and adults (Holt et al., 2020). Saloviki et al. (2021) claims that the term *emotional skills* could be used in a general way in order to understand the topic easier. However, the definitions of emotional skills cannot be used separately from each other as only the sum of them can reflect the complexity of emotional intelligence (Terzioglu, 2018).

**Table 5.** Definitions of emotional skills

Definition	Author
Ability to understand and accurately convey emotions, use emotions to facilitate thoughts, to understand emotions and to control them.	Brackett et al., 2004
Conscious ability to understand one's emotions and those of others by correctly identifying and conveying them.	Faupel, 2003
Components of emotional intelligence that enable one to recognize, understand and comprehend emotional experiences.	Gohm, Clore, 2002
Ability to control positive and negative emotions intra- and interpersonally, ability to control strong emotions.	Luebbers et al., 2007
Ability to recognize, process and use emotional information.	Petrides et al., 2001
Ability to observe and recognize emotions and feelings intra- and interpersonally to facilitate thought and control behavior.	Salovey, Mayer, 1990

Emotional intelligence is described as a psychological process that enables one to use, understand and control emotions in self and others by controlling behavior and solving problems (Salovey, Mayer, 1990). This indicates that emotional intelligence is linked to a complex usage of emotional skills in individual and social tasks. From the social skills' perspective, emotional intelligence is described as a cognitive skill based on processing emotional information. Academic literature mentions various emotional skills types that give basis to the definition of emotional intelligence (Table 6). However, there are three most prevalent models of the emotional intelligence: 1) Bar-On (Bar-On, 2006) 2) Goleman (Goleman, 1996), and 3) Salovey and Mayer (Salovey, Mayer, 1990).

**Table 6.** Types of emotional skills

Author	Types of emotional skills
Bar-on, 2006	Intrapersonal skills Self-expression skills Interpersonal skills Decision making skills Stress Management
Brackett et al., 2011; Palmer, 2003; Salokivi et al., 2021; Salovey, Mayer, 1990	Ability to control emotions Ability to understand and analyze emotions Ability to utilize previous positive experiences Ability to evaluate and express emotions
CASEL, 2013; Zins et al., 2004	Self-awareness Self-management Social awareness Relationship skills Responsible decision making
Goleman, Cherniss, 2001	Self-awareness Self-control Social awareness Relationship skills
Holsen et al., 2008	Problem-solving skills Perspective taking Empathy Self-control Emotional control
Johnston et al., 2013	Empathy Emotional self-control Networking skills
Merrell et al., 2007	Ability to identify emotions Ability to overcome negative thoughts Ability to relax Ability to set goals Ability to think positively

Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability to observe, recognize one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions and use that information in order to control one’s thoughts and behavior. Contrary to Bar-On and Goleman, Salovey and Mayer base their emotional intelligence model on skills, which is why they consider emotional intelligence a form of intelligence. Troth et al. (2012) defines these skills as positive emotional skills. Salokivi and others (2021) discuss the main emotional skills construct in their scope review on emotional skills. They have found that the main emotional skills are: expressing emotions, monitoring emotions, identifying emotions, understanding emotions, regulating emotions, using one’s positive emotional experience. We can conclude that the emotional skills classification suggested by Salokivi et al. (2021) matches the concept of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). Due to this, we deduce that positive emotional skills are the ones that comprise the model introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990).

The research analysis on the theoretical foundations of positive behavior skills has presented their construct, existing models and the skills they involve. Table 7 shows a model of positive behavior skills that could be interpreted as the conceptual basis of educational programs for the development of positive behavior skills. These positive personal, positive social and positive emotional skills and the abilities that comprise them are essential when creating educational programs for young athletes as well.

**Table 7.** Structural model of positive behavior skills for young athletes (created by authors)

Skill type	Skill title	Skill definition
Positive personal skills	Taking responsibility	ability to take responsibility for one's actions, ability to engage actively in different tasks (Campayo-Munoz et al., 2020)
	Positive self-evaluation	ability to believe in one's right to be happy, ability to feel one's worth, to understand one's right to express one's wishes, ability to enjoy one's achievements (Branden, 2021)
	Prosocial behavior	ability to share in order to provide for the ones that are lacking, ability to cooperate in order to achieve common goals (Dunfield, Kuhlmeier, 2013)
Positive social skills	Cooperation	ability to cooperate to achieve common goals (Johnston et al., 2013)
	Assertiveness	ability to defend one's right without intending to inflict harm on others (Hazavehei et al., 2008; Lange, Jakubowski, 1976)
	Empathy	ability to take another person's stance and see their perspective (Junge et al., 2020)
	Self-control	ability to control one's short-term desires and goals in order to reach more important long-term goals (Pan, Zhu, 2018)
	Taking social responsibility	ability to take responsibility for one's actions and towards others (Parker, Stiehl, 2005)
Positive emotional skills	Ability to evaluate and convey emotions	ability to recognize emotions intra- and inter-personally, as well as in objects (e.g. pictures); ability to express one's emotions accurately (Ackley, 2016)
	Ability to utilize one's positive emotional experience	ability to prioritize thoughts and utilize emotions as a tool to solve issues (Ackley, 2016)
	Ability to comprehend and analyze emotions	ability to distinguish emotions, comprehend the relation between emotions and feelings and their development (Ackley, 2016)
	Ability to control emotions	ability to stay open to feelings, to distance oneself from feelings, to control emotions and be able to influence the emotions of others (Ackley, 2016)

**4. Discussion**

This scientific literature analysis (Ackley, 2016; Branden, 2021; Campayo-Munoz et al., 2020; Johnston et al., 2013; Junge et al., 2020; Pan, Zhu, 2018; Parker, Stiehl, 2005) on positive behavior skill development shows that the construct of positive behavior skills comprises positive personal, positive social and positive emotional skills. It proves that the structural model of positive behavior skills is multi-layered and involves various positive personal, positive social and positive emotional skills. Our theoretical analysis demonstrates that the group of positive personal skills includes positive self-evaluations, prosocial behavior and taking responsibility. The positive social skills group constitutes of cooperation, assertiveness, empathy, self-control and social responsibility skills. The ability to evaluate and convey emotions, utilize one's positive experiences, to comprehend, analyze and control emotions are attributed to the positive emotional skills group.

**5. Conclusion**

To summarize the results of this literature analysis, future educational programs for young athletes should stress the development of positive personal, positive social and positive emotional skills. These educational programs should be based on the structural positive behavior skills model



and adapted to young sportspeople. Succeeding studies can empirically evaluate the effect of such educational programs to young athletes.

One of the benefits of the positive behavior paradigm is that the positive behavior skills are applicable not only in sports education but also in general life situations (Pearson et al., 2021). Therefore, future research can evaluate the benefits of positive behavior skills not only in the education of young athletes but also to their personal lives.

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