

# **Early Development of Emotional Competence Tool for Children with Complex Communication Needs: Development and Evidence**

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## **Extended abstract**

### **Aim**

This presentation will discuss the development of the Early Development of Emotional Competence in Children (EDEC) tool and its clinical implications. The EDEC tool is a descriptive assessment instrument that professionals (e.g., SLPs) can use to interview parents/caregivers and/or teachers of children who require AAC. The goal is to elicit information about how children and families currently communicate about emotions and emotional situations. The EDEC tool seeks to raise awareness about the relation of language and emotional competence, and to ensure that a child's communication intervention includes language to discuss emotions in ways that are consistent with the values and goals of the family. The EDEC tool was developed with a target population of young children (birth-10 years) with CCN, who have very limited speech and language skills due to various etiologies (e.g., cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, etc.). The tool is organized into two sections: Section I: Questions about temperament/behavioral characteristics and Section II: Questions about child with complex communication needs & family dynamics.

The goal of this presentation is to introduce the EDEC tool, discuss its importance for children who use AAC, and describe the process by which we have sought to ensure that the tool can be used in various language/cultural communities. We will describe our recommended process for translating the tool into languages other than English, as well as our experiences in undergoing that process. Finally, we will present two small research studies that demonstrated two uses of the tool: (a) its application as a means to solicit information within and across language communities, specifically, how American versus Korean parents report on communication about emotion; and (b) its application as a means to increase communication about emotions in children with developmental disability, specifically, Down syndrome.

### **Clinical background for the EDEC tool**

Emotional competence likely contributes to and benefits from successful social communication.<sup>1</sup> Emotional competence, as defined by Saarni,<sup>2</sup> is "a set of affect-oriented behavioral, cognitive & regulatory skills that emerge over time as a person develops in a social context" (p.3). Most interventions for AAC users focus heavily on the areas of linguistic and operational competence: that is, the mastery of the linguistic code of the spoken native language and linguistic code of the AAC system, as well as the technical skills for AAC system operation.<sup>3</sup> Blackstone and Wilkins call attention to the absence of any research on or discussion about the relation of emotional competence and communication outcomes of children with CCN.<sup>4</sup> Children who use AAC often have difficulty with expression of emotion due to physical, motor, or cognitive challenges, and

difficulty with interactions with people/environment.<sup>4</sup> In an effort to provide a structured framework for clinicians to collect important information regarding emotional competence of children with CCN, the authors created the EDEC tool. It begins with assessment that collects information on how the child currently participates, what their needs and priorities are, their strengths and limitations, and their opportunity and access barriers that affect an individual's ability to fully participate in desired, meaningful social, educational, and professional activities.

### **Translation**

The EDEC tool was deliberately designed to give insight into cultural differences in families' beliefs and attitudes surrounding emotional expression. A five-step translation process therefore was developed for the development of an EDEC tool that is sensitive to and incorporates the cultural values in people's interpretation of situations associated with certain emotions. Following the guidelines by Guillemin, Bombardier, and Beaton,<sup>5</sup> the five-step translation process recommends that syntax, semantic, idiomatic, experiential and conceptual equivalence in translation should be considered for cross-cultural adaption of the EDEC tool.

We will first illustrate the 5 steps in translation: an initial translation, specialist review, pilot cases for feedback, reverse translation and feedback of the reverse translation. We will then turn to demonstrate the importance of considering conceptual equivalence across cultures. Strategies for the initial translation steps consist of, but not limited to, grammatical alterations, identification of ambiguous vocabulary, adaptations of idiomatic and colloquial expressions, identification of cultural- or emotional-inappropriate terms. Reliability of translation can be evaluated through pilot testing, reverse translation and specialist reviews. Strategies of resolving discrepancies between feedbacks and initial translations will be discussed.

### **Initial Validation of the Tool: Two Research Studies**

Two experimental studies have been conducted to assess the validity of the EDEC tool and investigate its clinical implications for AAC interventions. The EDEC tool can possibly deliver useful data for clinicians to apply to intervention. Ideally, the tool is expected to be useful for a range of clients across a variety of disabilities, severities, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In order to assess the validity of the EDEC tool, the authors interviewed 20 parents of children developing typically using the tool.<sup>6</sup> The EDEC tool generated a range answers in parents' reports on behavioral characteristics and emotional competence in these children influenced by various factors such as child's age, child's gender, parents' cultural background, family religion, etc., which were expected by evidence in literature. The results indicated the sensitivity of the EDEC tool as an assessment tool to various contributing factors.

The EDEC tool was also used in a single-subject multiple-baseline design examining the effects of an instruction program to teach parents of children with Down syndrome strategies for incorporating aided AAC into conversations about emotions.<sup>7</sup> The

EDEC tool interview results were used to reveal the participating children's behavioral patterns in relation to emotion communication and their parents existing input strategies prior to the intervention.

## Conclusion

Providing a child with culturally-appropriate ways to communicate about emotions seems likely to be an important step in allowing them to develop emotional competence skills. Using the information from the EDEC tool interview, clinicians can provide more appropriate AAC intervention services to improve language or communication skills that children with CCN can use for emotion discussion and ultimately enhance participation outcomes in their routines and activities.

## References

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## Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors disclose they have no financial or other interest in objects or entities mentioned in this paper.

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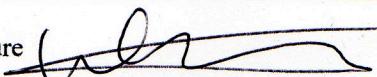
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