Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES): Istanbul (Turkey)

OECD

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The OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills

Research shows that both cognitive, and social and emotional skills improve life outcomes at a societal and an individual level. Considerable information exists on the development of cognitive skills but is lacking for social and emotional skills. The OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) was established to fill this important information gap.

The SSES aims to:

- Provide participating cities with information on their students' social and emotional skills.
- Identify factors in students' home, school and peer environments that promote or hinder the development of social and emotional skills.
- Explore how broader policy, cultural and socio-economic contexts influence these skills.
- Demonstrate that valid, reliable, comparable information on social and emotional skills can be produced across diverse populations and settings.

What are social and emotional skills?

Social and emotional skills are individual abilities, attributes and characteristics that are important for academic success, employability, active citizenship and well-being. They encompass behavioural dispositions, internal states, approaches to tasks, and management and control of behaviour and feelings. Beliefs about the self and the world that characterise an individual's relationships to others are also components of social and emotional skills.

Educators and policy makers are increasingly seeking to complement the focus on academic abilities such as mathematics, reading, or scientific literacy with attention to social and emotional capabilities in order to boost students' prospects as full participants in society and active citizens. Enhancing specific social and emotional skills boosts students' ability to develop their cognitive skills. But the benefits of developing children's social-emotional skills go beyond cognitive development and academic outcomes. They also improve mental health and other important life outcomes. Inconspicuous yet significantly impactful, social and emotional skills help shape individuals' behaviours and lifestyles, which, in turn, shape their socio-economic outcomes. Together, social, emotional and cognitive skills constitute a comprehensive toolbox, essential to students' success at school and beyond.

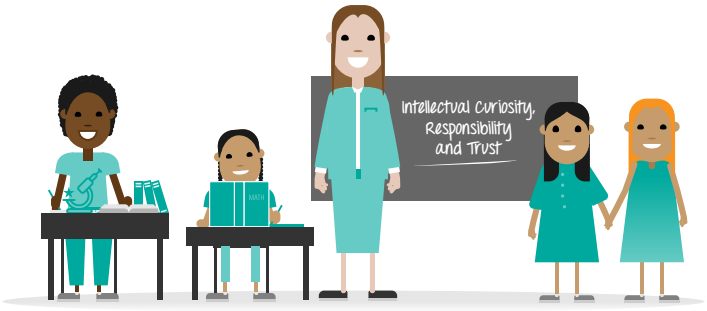
The OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) focuses on 17 social and emotional skills ranging from curiosity and creativity through to emotional control (see Figure 1). These skills have been selected according to three main criteria. First, previous research shows that they are associated with individuals' educational attainment, labour market outcomes, health and well-being. Second, they can be improved through interventions and policy measures during the years a student spends in school. Third, they are suitable for comparability across countries and age cohorts.

Figure 1. Description of the skills included in the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills

DOMAINS	SKILLS	DESCRIPTION
OPEN-MINDEDNESS (Openness to experience)	CURIOSITY	Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mind-set.
	TOLERANCE	Is open to different points of view, values diversity, is appreciative of foreign people and cultures.
	CREATIVITY	Generating novel ways to do or think about things through exploring, learning from failure, insight and vision.
TASK PERFORMANCE (Conscientiousness)	RESPONSIBILITY	Able to honour commitments, and be punctual and reliable.
	SELF-CONTROL	Able to avoid distractions and sudden impulses and focus attention on the current task in order to achieve personal goals.
	PERSISTENCE	Persevering in tasks and activities until they get done.
ENGAGING WITH OTHERS (Extraversion)	SOCIABILITY	Able to approach others, both friends and strangers, initiating and maintaining social connections.
	ASSERTIVENESS	Able to confidently voice opinions, needs, and feelings, and exert social influence.
	ENERGY	Approaching daily life with energy, excitement and spontaneity.
EMOTION REGULATION (Emotional stability)	STRESS RESISTANCE	Effectiveness in modulating anxiety and able to calmly solve problems (is relaxed, handles stress well).
	OPTIMISM	Positive and optimistic expectations for self and life in general.
	EMOTIONAL CONTROL	Effective strategies for regulating temper, anger and irritation in the face of frustrations.
COLLABORATION (Agreeableness)	EMPATHY	Understanding and caring for others and their well-being that leads to valuing and investing in close relationships.
	TRUST	Assuming that others generally have good intentions and forgiving those who have done wrong.
	CO-OPERATION	Living in harmony with others and valuing interconnectedness among all people.
ADDITIONAL INDICES	ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION	Setting high standards for oneself and working hard to meet them.
	SELF-EFFICACY	The strength of individuals' beliefs in their ability to execute tasks and achieve goals.

Source: Assessment Framework of the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019[1])

HIGHLIGHTS FOR ISTANBUL (TURKEY)

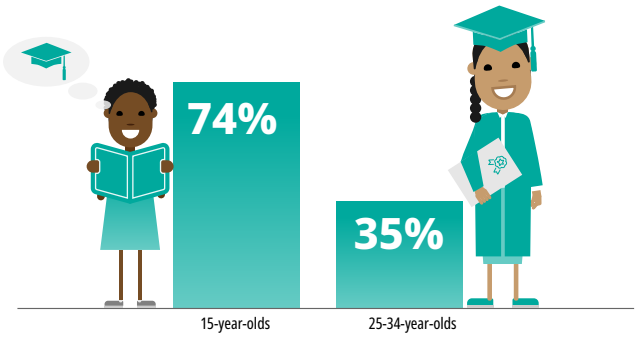


In Istanbul, intellectual curiosity, responsibility and trust are the social and emotional skills most strongly related to students' school performance for 15-year-olds in all three subjects in the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES).

In Istanbul, 15-year-olds reported lower levels than 10-year-olds on all social and emotional skills, except for tolerance, empathy and assertiveness.

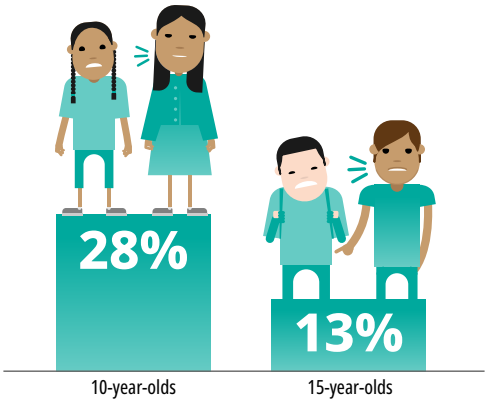
In Istanbul, as well as on average across participating cities, 15-year-old boys exhibit higher skills in the domains of emotional regulation (stress resistance, optimism and emotional control) and engaging with others (sociability, assertiveness, energy). Likewise, 15-year-old girls exhibit higher levels of responsibility, empathy, co-operation and tolerance.

In Istanbul, differences in skills based on students' socio-economic status are generally smaller compared to the average across all participating cities.



In Istanbul, 74% of 15-year-olds reported that they expected to go on and complete a tertiary degree – much higher than the current share of 25-34 year-olds who are tertiary educated in Turkey (35%). In Istanbul and in all participating cities, students tend to have higher educational expectations when they report higher levels of curiosity.

Students who participate in after-school art activities report higher levels of creativity, particularly among 15-year-olds. Differences in creativity levels between students participating and not participating in art activities are strong in Istanbul compared to other cities.



In Istanbul, 28% of 10-year-olds and 13% of 15-year-olds have experienced bullying at least a few times a month or more. Students' exposure to bullying is negatively related to almost all social and emotional skills.

Find more about the findings of the ***Survey on Social and Emotional Skills*** in the international report: OECD (2021), *Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en

The context of social and emotional learning in Istanbul (Turkey)

Istanbul (Turkey) is one of the ten cities that took part in the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) in 2019 (see Box 1 for demographic information about the city of Istanbul). Istanbul is one of the main cities of Turkey. With more than 15 million inhabitants, Istanbul is the most populous city in the SSES, ahead of Moscow (the Russian Federation, more than 12 million inhabitants) and Suzhou (China, more than 10 million inhabitants). With a median age of 33, it is among the youngest participating cities along with Houston (United States) and Bogotá (Colombia). Istanbul also exhibits the highest unemployment rate among the SSES-participating cities. Compared to the rest of Turkey, Istanbul is also distinguished by a slightly higher rate of unemployment for individuals aged 25 and above (12.8% versus 11.5% for the whole of Turkey) combined with a higher share of tertiary-educated people (29.1% versus 17.5% for the whole of Turkey). Education is obviously one of Turkey's key areas of investment. An estimated 5% of the gross domestic product (GDP) was spent on education in 2017 compared to 4.9% on average in the OECD in 2017 (OECD, 2020[2]).

OECD surveys such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) have shed light on Turkish students' knowledge and cognitive skills in mathematics, science and reading, enabling cross-country comparisons. PISA 2018 showed that 15-year-old students in Turkey had lower scores in reading, mathematics and science than the OECD average. In PISA 2018, girls significantly outperformed boys in reading and science while in mathematics girls and boys performed similarly. Differences in performance across subjects are also explained by socio-economic status. Socio-economically advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged students but the score difference is not significantly different from the OECD average (OECD, 2019[3]). PISA 2018 additionally revealed that in Turkey 52% of students had skipped a day of school in the two weeks prior to the survey, which is much higher than the OECD average (21%). PISA 2018 also indicated that in most participating countries and economies, frequently bullied students were more likely to skip school, while students who valued school and received greater social and emotional support from their parents were less likely to skip school (OECD, 2019[3]).

Box 1. Key demographic information about Istanbul (Turkey)

City: Istanbul
Location: Turkey
Population (2019): 15 519 267 inhabitants
Median age (2019): 33
Share of first-generation immigrants (2019): 6%
Share of 25-34 year-olds who are tertiary educated in Turkey (2019): 35%
Average unemployment level among adults aged 25 or more (2019): 13%

Source: *Information provided by the city of Istanbul*
OECD (2020), Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en

However, little is known about students' social and emotional skills and how these relate to their outcomes, despite the attention paid to these skills in Turkey as well as in the city of Istanbul (Turkey). Istanbul's participation in SSES in 2019 helps fill this important information gap.

In recent years, schools in Istanbul have increased their focus on promoting students' overall social and emotional well-being. They follow a mixture of national and local goals that promote students' social and emotional skills through the national curricula; the provision of guidance and psychological counselling services to students; and the definition of targets for each academic year. While targets are mainly set by the national government, there is a degree of autonomy in the implementation of social and emotional targets at local levels through the establishment of province-level commissions.

Istanbul's main reasons for investing in students' social and emotional learning encompass the goals of improving students' academic outcomes, social and emotional well-being, engagement in school and capacity to cope with challenges; decreasing student absenteeism and truancy; and improving professional learning outcomes for school staff and teachers.

Social and emotional skills are part of Turkey's educational goals from pre-primary up to the end of secondary education. These goals are set out in the National Education Basic Law No. 1739[1], which determines the general principles of education for Turkey. This law aims to equip students with cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral skills for positive living and working together. Curricula implemented in the educational system should be complementary throughout career pathways, respectful towards individual development processes, and pursue the following goals:

- supporting the healthy physical, mental and emotional development of children attending pre-school education and taking into account the individual development process of each child
- ensuring that, towards the end of primary education, students have developed self-confidence, self-awareness, self-discipline and moral integrity in accordance with other aspects of their development and their individuality in addition to acquiring verbal competencies, numerical and scientific reasoning, social skills and aesthetic sensitivity
- ensuring that, towards the end of secondary education, students have adopted the national and moral values set out in the law; have further developed the academic and social-emotional competencies acquired in primary education; and exhibit social and emotional maturity in their personal life as well as their life as citizens

Social and emotional skills are embedded in all educational curricula under the 8 key competencies of the Turkish Qualifications Framework[2] and national values. The Turkish Qualifications Framework covers 8 competencies: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and key competencies in science/technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competence; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness. The national values (justice, friendship, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism and benevolence) are meant to be developed through the implementation of the curricula and come to life in the teaching-learning process.

At the local level, schools in Istanbul (Turkey) and in the rest of the country provide guidance and psychological counselling services to students from pre-primary through to the end of secondary education. The counsellors (usually psychological counsellors or classroom counsellor teachers) set classroom attainment goals according to age groups and conduct guidance sessions on a weekly basis.

Turkey has also set up advisory commissions at the provincial level, which set two local targets per academic year in addition to those set by the Ministry of Education. These targets are set in response to the specific needs of each province, and schools are encouraged to contribute towards the creation of the targets. The targets rely on the contributions of all three types of stakeholders – students, teachers and parents. They generally aim to enhance a variety of skills included in SSES, particularly in the domains of emotional regulation (stress resistance, emotional control and optimism), collaboration (empathy, trust, co-operation), task performance (persistence, responsibility and self-efficacy) as well as in achievement orientation and self-efficacy.

While this overview provides some context to examine findings from the SSES for the city of Istanbul (Turkey), no conclusion can be drawn from SSES as to how elements of this context influence social and emotional learning in Istanbul.

1 https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.1739.pdf

2 https://www.myk.gov.tr/TRR/File6.pdf

Social and emotional skills matter for academic success

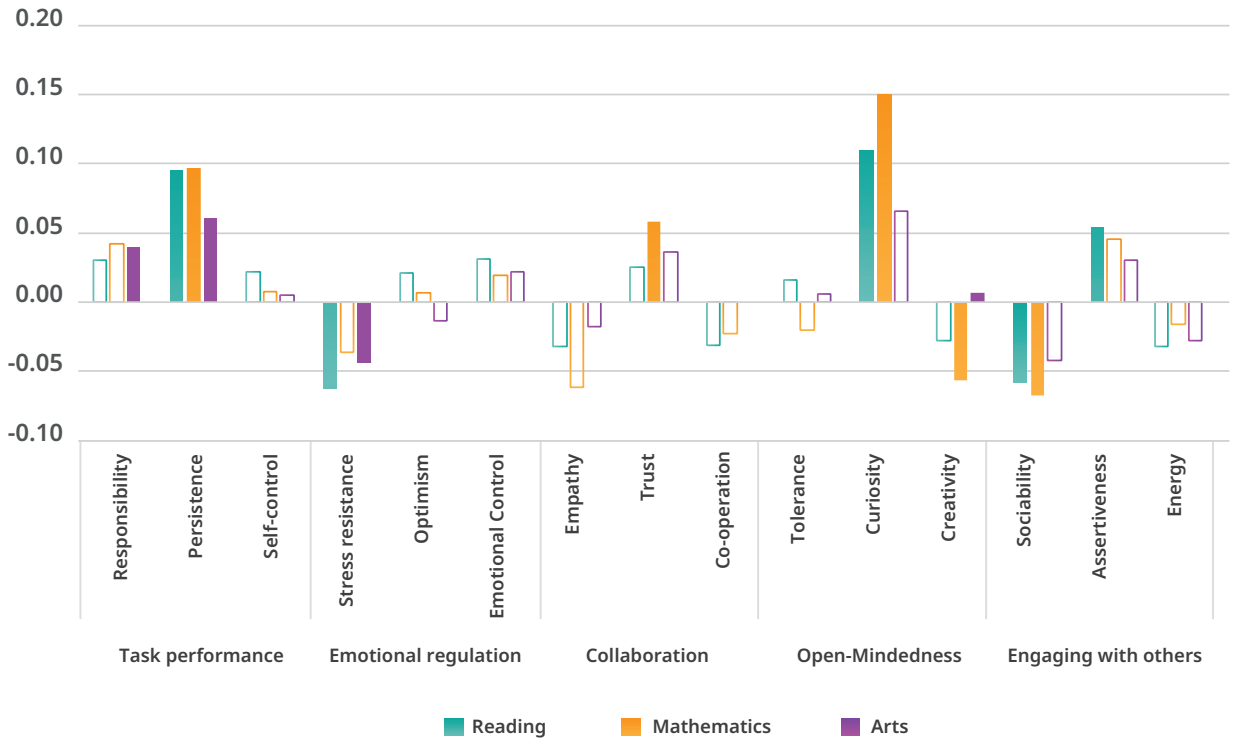
Students' school achievement is one of the main drivers of success in life. It is linked to later educational attainment but also to important life outcomes like employment, earnings, health and well-being. However, having the same academic performance in school does not always lead to the same life outcomes. One potential reason why some students are more likely to succeed than others is that they have developed specific social and emotional skills, which intervene in the equation.

In all participating cities but Ottawa (Canada), SSES collected information on students' school grades in three subjects: reading, mathematics and the arts along with the results of a short cognitive ability test administered to participating students. SSES data show that students' social and emotional skills are significant predictors of school grades (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The strengths of the associations between certain social and emotional skills and school grades are relatively weak but consistent across age cohorts and subjects and they remain after accounting for gender and socio-economic differences across students. In particular, being intellectually curious and persistent are the social and emotional skills most strongly related to school grades for both 10- and 15-year-olds in all three subjects. To a lesser extent, students who are more assertive and responsible also tend to have better school grades. These findings stress the importance of not only pursuing objectives in the face of difficulties but also to have an intellectual curiosity about a diverse set of topics and to love learning new things.

Fifteen-year-olds who reported being more stress-resistant (relaxed) and sociable have, on average, lower school grades (Figure 2). This does not mean that calmness in face of adversity (a benefit of being stress-resistant) and seeking support from peers are harmful to school achievement. Instead, this finding might be related to the fact that older students who typically have more autonomy than younger students may prioritise their social interactions at the expense of school work. Students who assess themselves as more stress-resistant might also be those who feel more remote from school and school demands. In fact, among the younger cohort, which is typically more supervised by parents and teachers, these relationships are not observed (Figure 3). In other words, younger students may have a less demanding school environment and are surrounded by adults who help them contain and channel their energy and desire to interact socially in ways that do not harm their school performance.

Figure 2. Relationship between social and emotional skills, and school performance of 15-year-old students

Coefficients of (standardised) grades in reading, mathematics and the arts on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skills scales (international average)

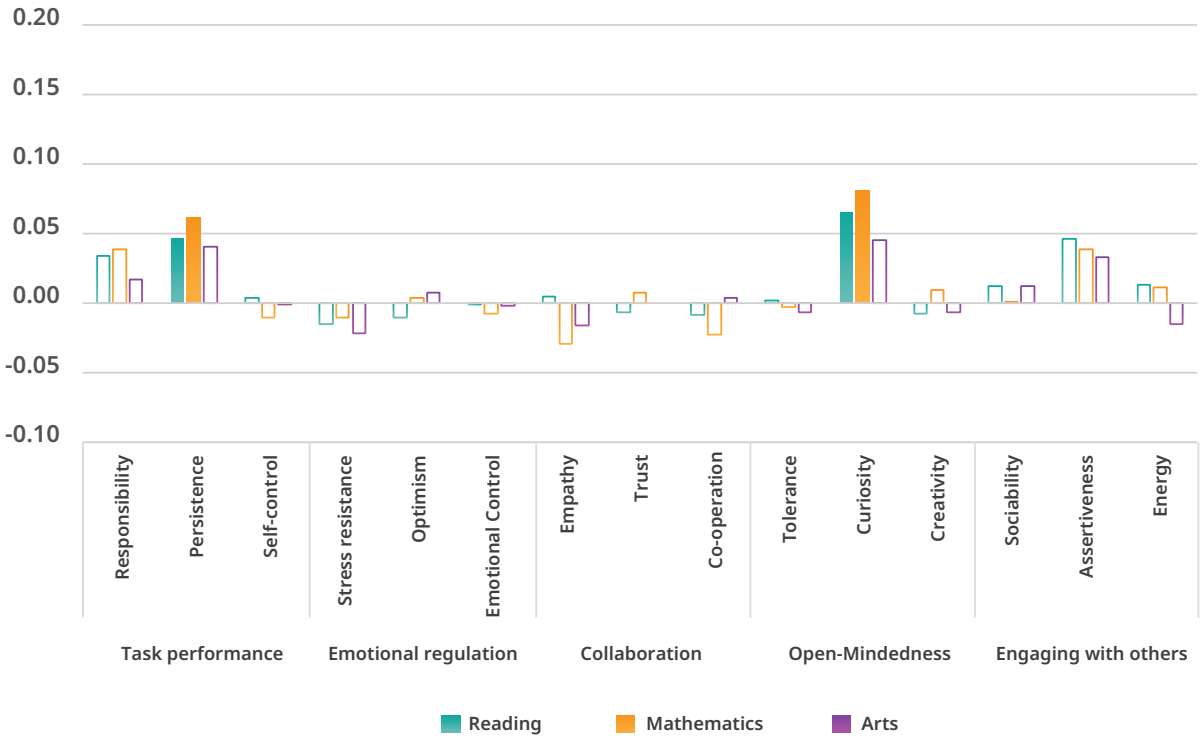


Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages. The regressions are city-specific and control for gender, socio-economic status, and scores in the cognitive ability test, with the exception of Houston (United States), where the cognitive ability test was not administered. Ottawa (Canada) is excluded from the analysis of school grades as students' grades were not available. Coloured bars represent significant differences in at least five cities, bars that are only outlined represent significant differences in fewer than five cities.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figure 2.1.*

Figure 3. Relationship between social and emotional skills, and school performance of 10-year-old students

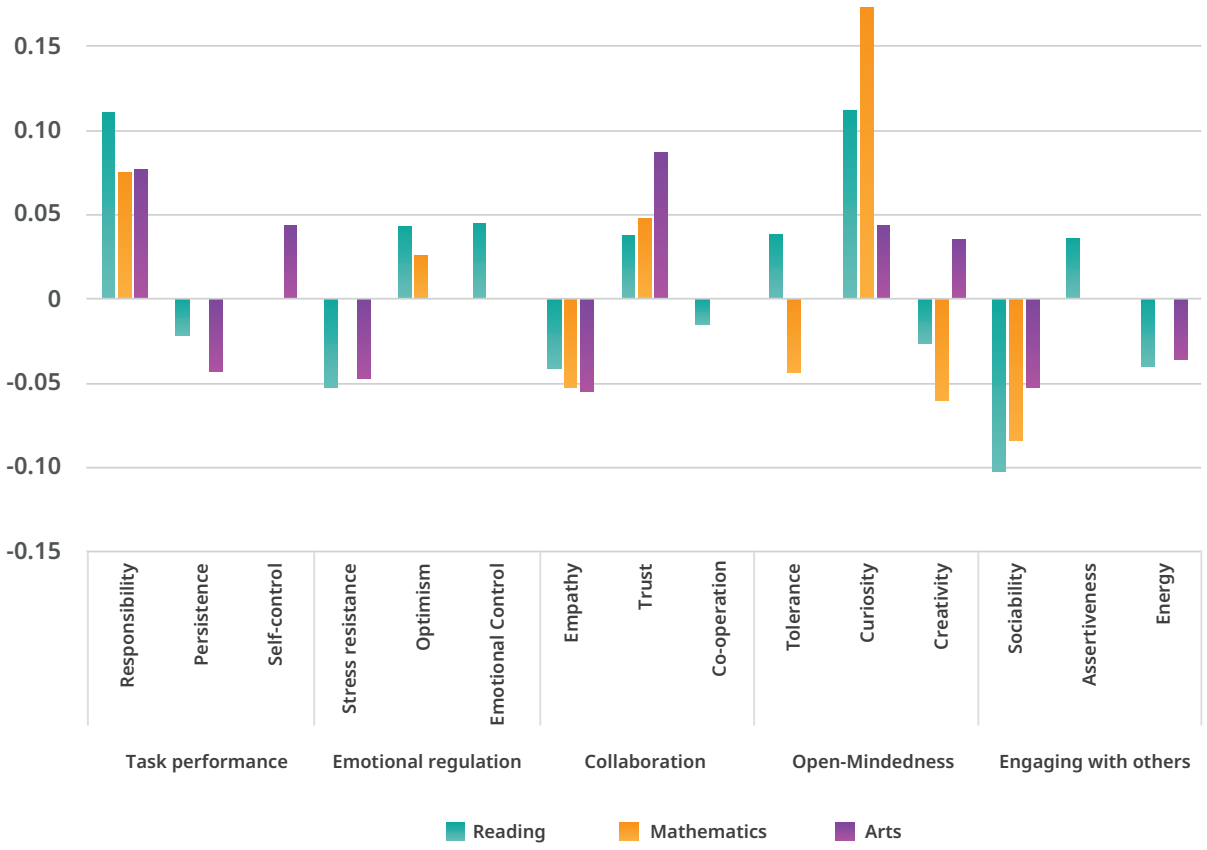
Coefficients of (standardised) grades in reading, mathematics and the arts on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skills scales (international average)



Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages. The regressions are city-specific and control for gender, socio-economic status, and scores in the cognitive ability test, with the exception of Houston (United States), where the cognitive ability test was not administered. Ottawa (Canada) is excluded from the analysis of school grades as students' grades were not available. Coloured bars represent significant differences in at least five cities, bars that are only outlined represent significant differences in fewer than five cities.*
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figure 2.2.*

Figure 4 provides an overview of the social and emotional skills that are most strongly related with students' grades in all three subjects for the city of Istanbul (Turkey). Being intellectually curious, responsible and trusting are the social and emotional skills most positively related to school grades for 15-year-olds in all three subjects considered as part of the SSES analysis: reading, mathematics and the arts. These findings emphasise the importance of not only acting responsibly and doing the work that you are asked to do but also cultivating an intellectual curiosity for a diverse range of topics. Students who reported being more trusting are those who feel that they can rely on their peers for support and confide in them. This appears conducive to higher school performance. In Istanbul, students who reported being more sociable and empathic have, on average, lower grades in all three subjects. School work towards the end of compulsory education can be demanding and academic achievement in high school is made even more challenging by students' peer relationships, which are often more complex. This may require students to re-evaluate priorities and relationships with their peers.

Figure 4. Skills most strongly associated with students' performance in Istanbul (Turkey)
Coefficients of (standardised) grades in reading, mathematics and the arts on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skills scales (international average)



Note: *Coefficients from regressions of 15-year-olds' (standardised) grades in reading, mathematics and the arts on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skills scales. Each regression controls for gender, socio-economic status, and scores in the cognitive ability test. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported.*
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Tables A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, A2.4, A2.5 and A2.6.*

Social and emotional skills matter for future educational and occupational outcomes

Adolescence is a period when young people start to prepare for adult life. Teenagers have to make important decisions relevant to their future lives such as what field of study or type of education they will pursue and what job they will have. But young people often have a distorted perception of their cognitive, social and emotional strengths, which is influenced by their immediate environment more than by objective information; and they may lack sufficient knowledge about the breadth of educational opportunities and careers open to them. Importantly, past research has argued and shown that social and emotional skills are an integral component of individuals' employability, i.e. individuals' capability of getting and keeping fulfilling work (Pool and Sewell, 2007[4]).

Education systems can play a crucial role in channelling these skills into the labour market, and helping young people develop a fair assessment of themselves and of their future educational opportunities. In doing so, they can ensure that students' skills, interests and aptitudes find a suitable match in the economy (Musset and Kurekova, 2018[5]).

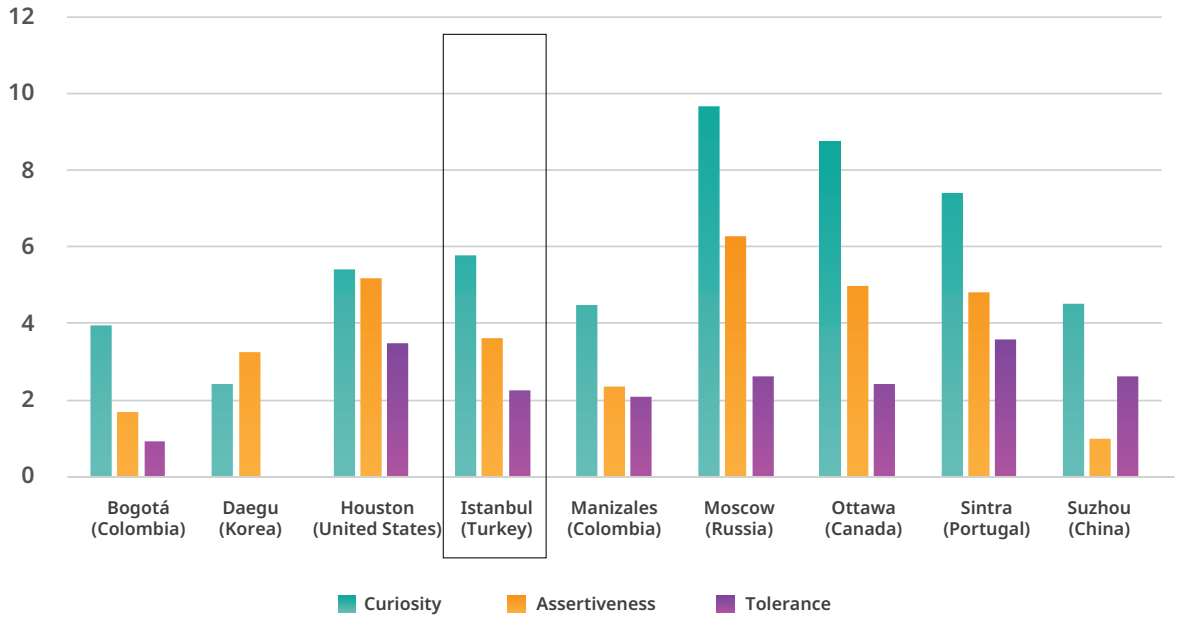
In Istanbul (Turkey), 74% of 15-year-olds reported that they expected to go on and complete a tertiary degree – this is slightly below the average observed across the participating cities (79%) but much lower than the maximum share observed for the city of Suzhou (China) at 91%. However, this share is much higher than the current share of 25-34 year-olds who are tertiary-educated in Turkey (35%) (OECD, 2020[2]). This suggests that 15-year-old students in Istanbul might have unrealistic expectations but it could also indicate strong ambition. Their educational expectations might also be dependent on external factors, such as high returns from completing tertiary education and low costs associated with pursuing such studies.

Across all SSES-participating cities with available data, the proportion of students who hold high expectations for further education is related to how they portrayed their own social and emotional skills. Among students of similar socio-economic background, differences in education expectations are often related to differences in social and emotional skills. In all participating cities, highly intellectually curious students tend to have higher educational expectations. Higher levels of assertiveness and tolerance are also, in Istanbul (Turkey) as well as in most cities, associated with expectations of completing higher education (Figure 5). At the same time, empathy, energy and sociability are slightly negatively related to educational expectations in Istanbul and a few other cities. Only in Istanbul and Houston (United States) were students who reported higher levels of co-operation also less likely to expect completing a tertiary degree (Figure 6). All these findings hold while accounting for other skill differences and for differences in gender and socio-economic status.

Why is curiosity strongly and consistently related to expectations for completing tertiary education? This likely reflects the fact that students with a great deal of curiosity and love of learning tend to have positive dispositions not only towards learning, in general, but also towards formal tertiary-education institutions; these students see tertiary institutions such as universities as places where their desire for knowledge can be satisfied. This indicates the importance of cultivating the affective dimensions that support academic performance – and not only behavioural tendencies such as persistence and self-control – in order to prepare students for lifelong learning.

Figure 5. How curiosity, assertiveness and tolerance relate to expectations of completing tertiary education

Percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to complete a tertiary degree

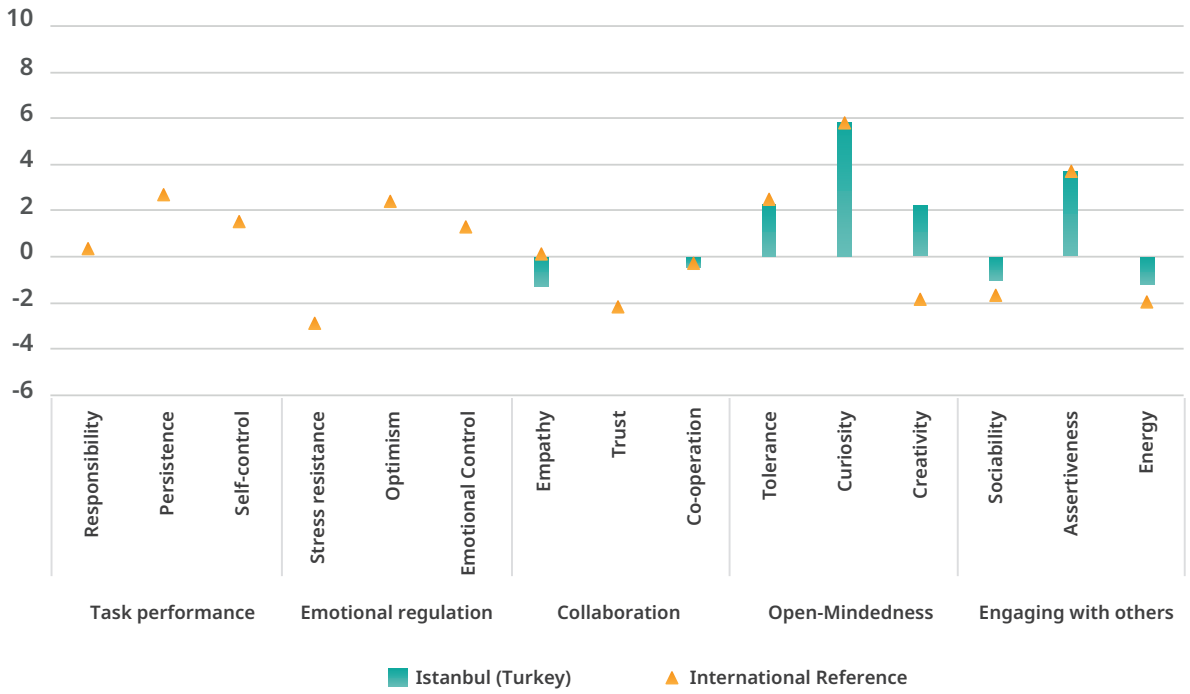


Note: *The figure shows the percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to complete a tertiary degree that is associated with a 100-point increase in the corresponding skill score. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender. Data for Helsinki (Finland) are not available.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A2.7.*

Figure 6. Skills most strongly associated with expectations of completing tertiary education in Istanbul (Turkey)

Percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to complete a tertiary degree



Note: *The figure shows the percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to complete a tertiary degree that is associated with a 100-point increase in the corresponding skill score. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender. Data for Helsinki (Finland) are not available.*

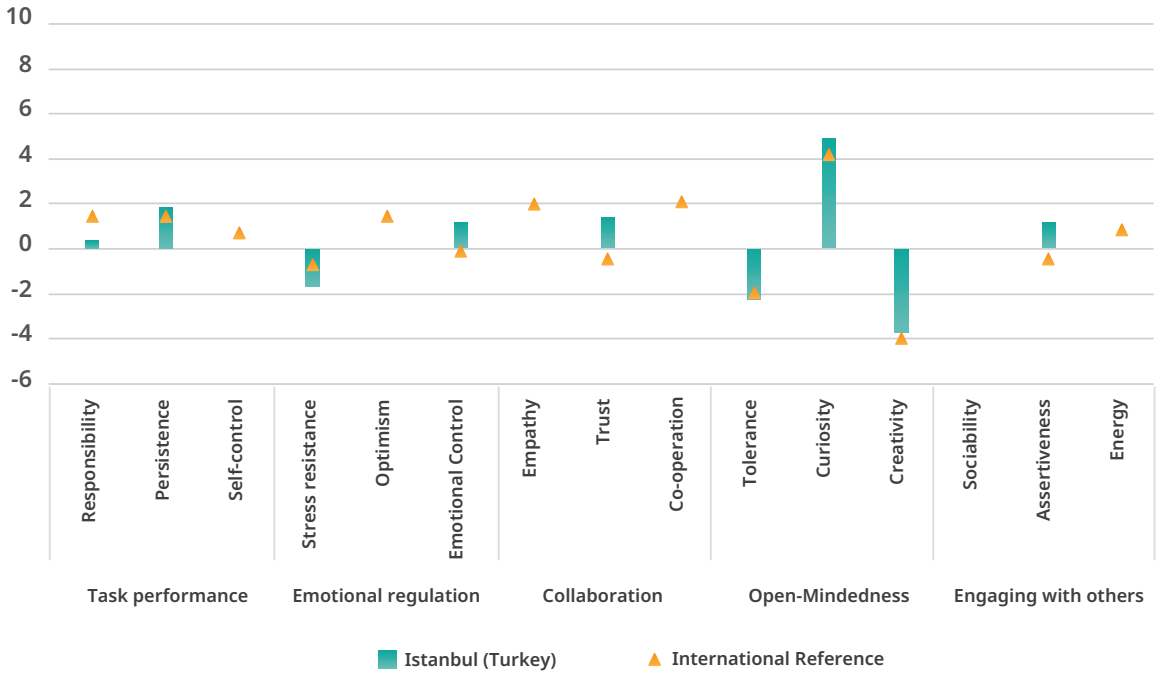
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, TTable A2.7.*

Similar to educational expectations, students' occupational expectations are related to specific patterns of social and emotional skills. First, the relations between social and emotional skills, and occupational expectations are much stronger among 15-year-olds than 10-year-olds. This might signal the interdependence of these two factors – students might develop job preferences adapted to their own cognitive, and social and emotional skills at the same time as they improve their skills to meet the requirements of their personal job aspirations.

Looking at 15-year-olds' job expectations, certain patterns of social and emotional skills emerge that are associated with aspirations to work in certain occupational groups. A few exemplar cases illustrate this. For example, in Istanbul (Turkey), as well as in all other participating cities, being intellectually curious is the skill most strongly related to aspiring to become a health professional (i.e. medical doctors, nursing and midwifery professionals) (Figure 7). In Istanbul and nearly all other cities, these students also represent themselves as less creative than other students. More specific to Istanbul is the fact that students aspiring to become health professionals are more trusting of other people. This combination of social and emotional skills is not surprising given that health occupations require curiosity for sciences and interpersonal skills to cater to patients' needs.

Figure 7. Skills most strongly associated with expectations of working as health professionals in Istanbul (Turkey)

Percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to become a health professional



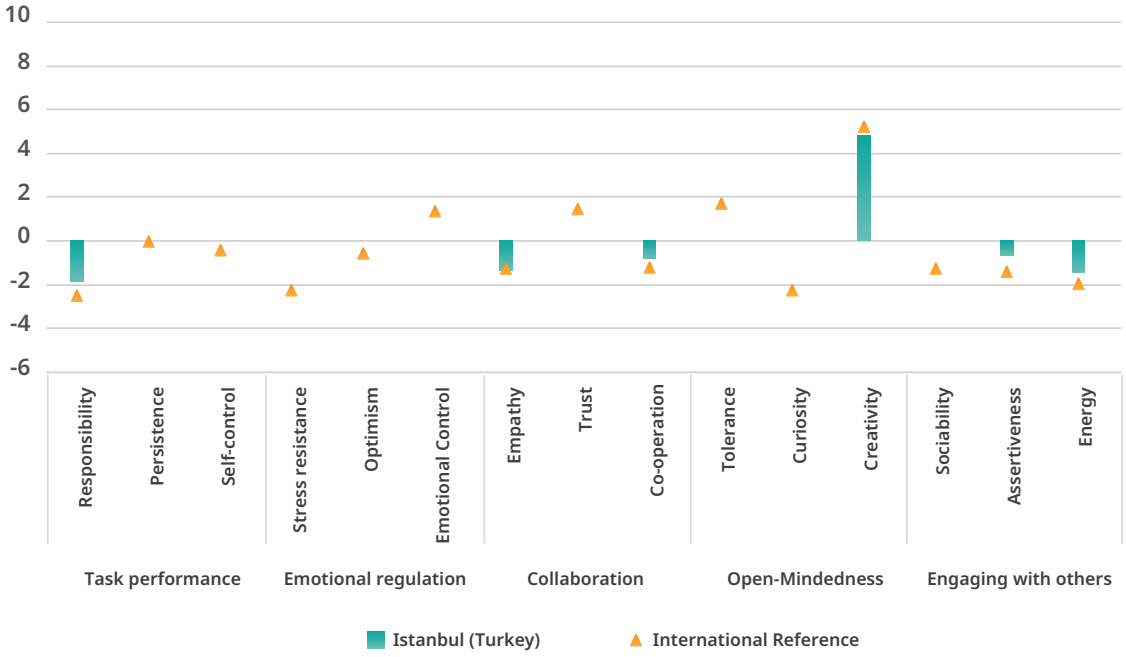
Note: *The figure shows the percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to become a health professional that is associated with a 100-point increase in the corresponding skill score. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A2.8.*

In all cities including Istanbul (Turkey), students expecting to work in a creative occupation also represent themselves as more creative (Figure 8). Creative occupations include, for example, artists, musicians, actors but also marketing directors, professionals and associate professionals, architects, journalists, public relations officers, and software professionals. In Istanbul, students expecting a creative occupation tend to be less inclined to engage and collaborate with others – they are less empathic, co-operative, responsible, assertive and energetic compared to students not expecting to work in a creative occupation.

Figure 8. Skills most strongly associated with expectations of working in a creative occupation in Istanbul (Turkey)

Percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to work in a creative occupation



Note: *The figure shows the percentage-point change in the likelihood that a 15-year-old student expects to work in a creative occupation that is associated with a 100-point increase in the corresponding skill score. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A4.20.*

Social and emotional skills matter for well-being

Well-being is an important measure of quality of life alongside other social and economic dimensions (OECD, 2013[6]). Adolescence is a period of rapid physical growth and brain development, increasing demands and expectations regarding school performance, changing relationships with parents and peers as well as increasing autonomy as students start to make their own decisions and develop behaviours that can influence their current and future well-being (Inchley et al., 2020[7]; Patton, 2016[8]). Education policies increasingly address student well-being as part of a whole-child perspective to education. This has led to increased emphasis on social and emotional skills alongside cognitive skills as drivers of future well-being.

The three aspects of students' psychological well-being measured in the SSES (life satisfaction, current psychological well-being and test anxiety) are strongly related to skills in the domain of emotional regulation: stress resistance, optimism and emotional control. All three aspects of students' psychological well-being are also only weakly related to skills in the domains of task performance and engaging with others.

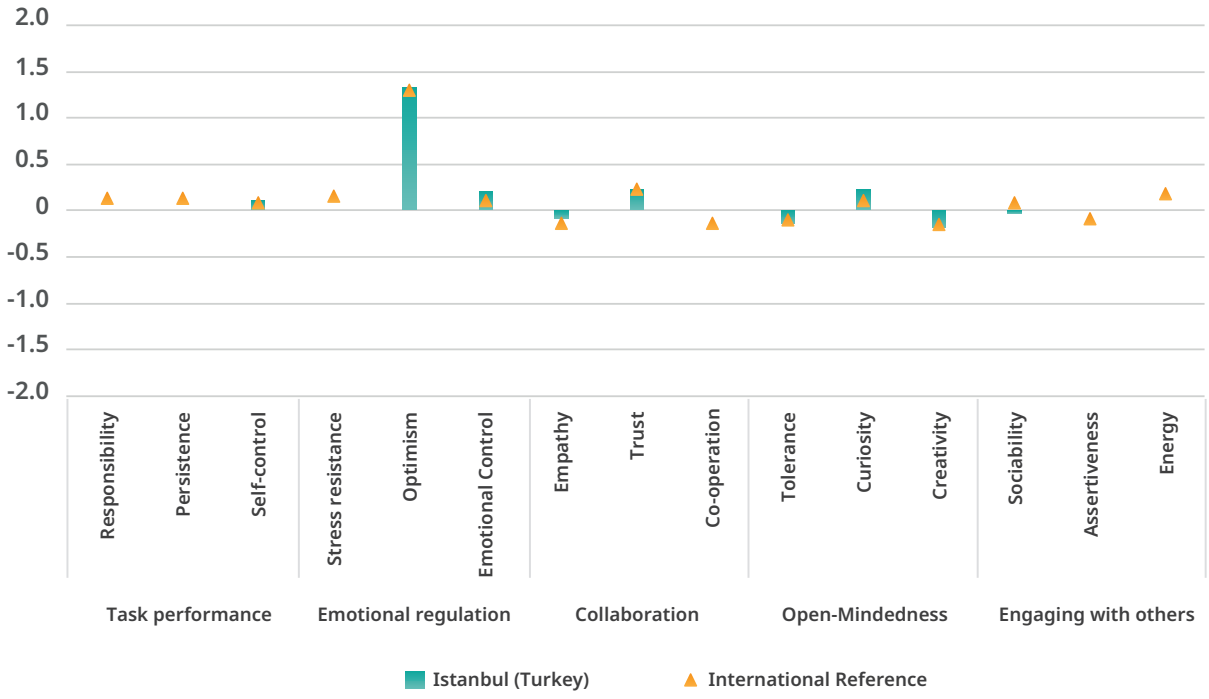
Life satisfaction

Students' life satisfaction is an evaluation that students make of their perceived quality of life according to their chosen criteria. This can be determined in part by the student's current mood and memory, and by the immediate context. In Istanbul (Turkey) and in all other participating cities, 15-year-old students who are more optimistic also reported higher levels of life satisfaction (Figure 9). This also holds true for 10-year-old students. Students who are optimistic have a positive attitude and favourable outlook towards life. At the same time, students who have a more privileged life might be more optimistic. Most importantly, higher levels of optimism are inversely related to depressive disorders. Optimism confers resilience and coping skills in dealing with stressful events, and is related to factors such as socio-economic status and social integration, which generally have protective effects for both psychological and physical well-being (Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom, 2010[9]).

In Istanbul (Turkey) as in most other cities, other social and emotional skills such as high levels of emotional control and trust, and low levels of creativity and tolerance are related to 15-year-olds' life satisfaction.

Figure 9. Skills most strongly associated with students' life satisfaction

Change in 15-years-olds' life satisfaction associated with changes in social and emotional skills



Note: *The figure shows coefficients from a regression of students' life satisfaction on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skill scales. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender.*

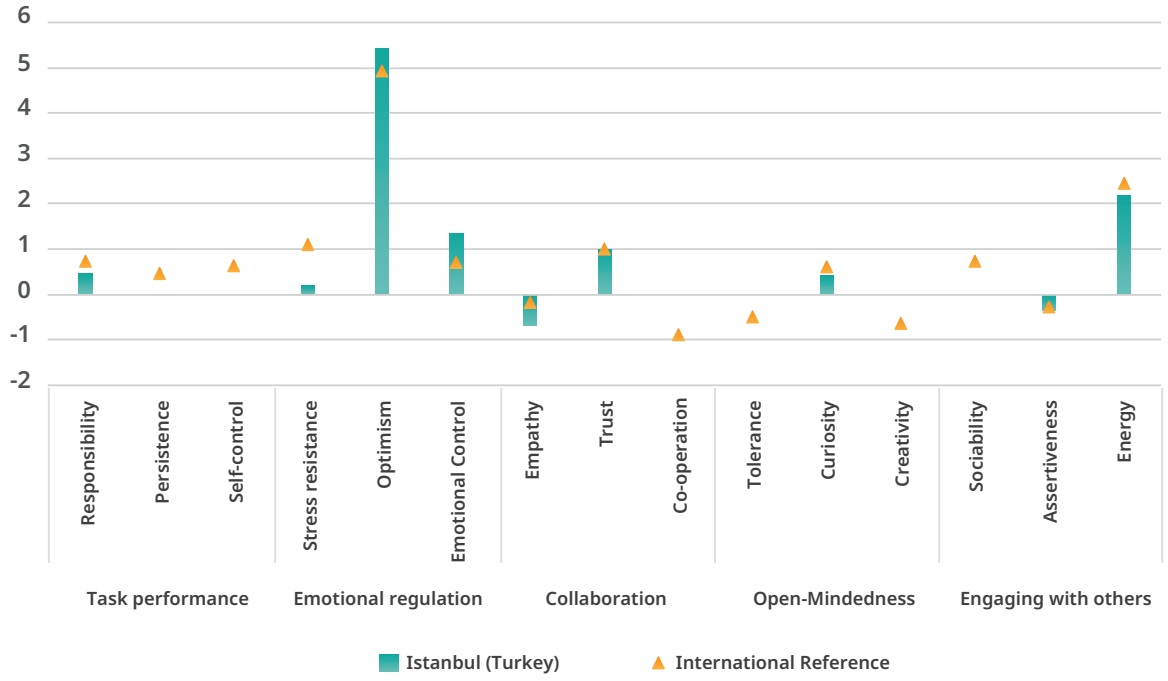
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A3.18.*

Current psychological well-being

Students' current psychological well-being is an evaluation of students' feelings and experiences during the two weeks prior to the survey. In Istanbul (Turkey) and in all other participating cities, being optimistic is strongly related to one's current psychological well-being (Figure 10). This holds true for both cohorts of students. Other social and emotional skills that matter for both 10- and 15-year-old students' current psychological well-being in Istanbul are students' level of emotional control, their trust of others and their level of energy. Students who are more optimistic generally respond differently to challenging situations than students who are less optimistic. Optimists are more likely to experience less distress than pessimists when dealing with difficulties in their lives (Scheier, Carver and Bridges, 2004[10]). This is not necessarily because optimists have unrealistic expectations (though that may sometimes be the case) but because they have more coping strategies to deal with challenging situations. Thinking that things will only get worse – even if true – may disengage someone from confronting a situation while thinking that things can improve – even if false – may motivate them to get the best out of a given situation.

Figure 10. Skills most strongly associated with students' current psychological well-being in Istanbul (Turkey)

Change in 15-year-olds' current psychological well-being associated with changes in social and emotional skills



Note: *The figure shows coefficients from regressions of students' current psychological well-being on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skill scales. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A3.19.*

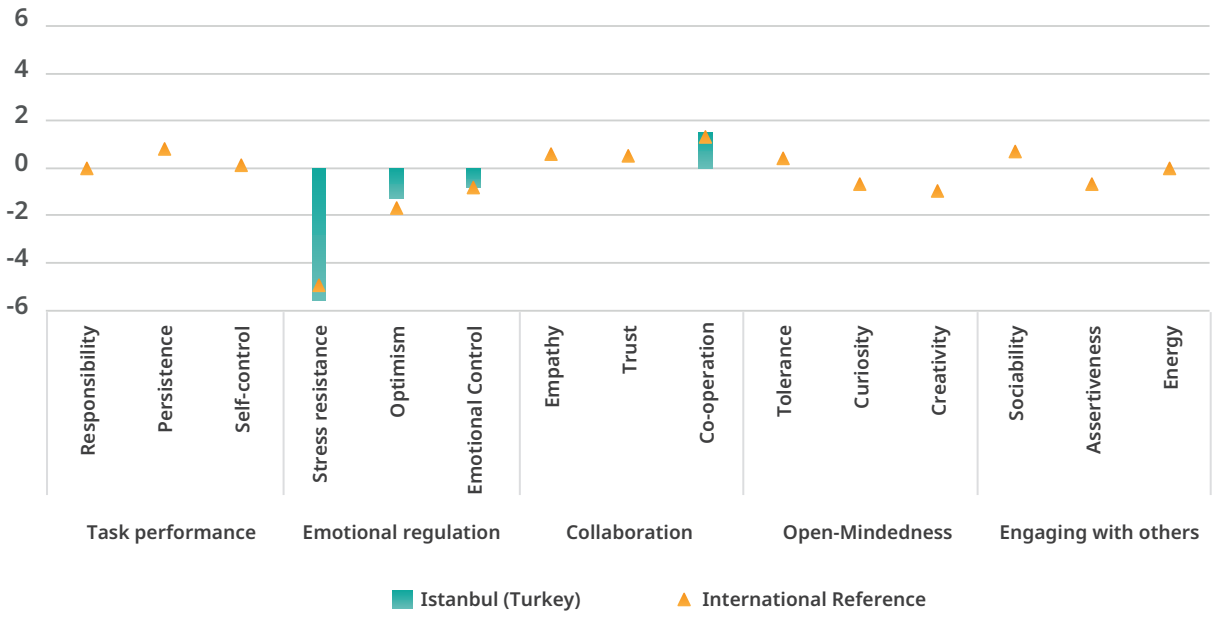
Test Anxiety

Test anxiety can be described as "the set of phenomenological, physiological, and behavioural responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure in an evaluative situation" (Zeidner, 2007[11]). It typically arises in educational settings where students believe their abilities are stretched or exceeded by the demands of the test situation. In Istanbul (Turkey) and in all participating cities with available data, students who indicated higher stress resistance reported a lower level of test anxiety. This holds true for students aged 10 and 15 while accounting for students' grades in both mathematics and reading, which are typically correlated with a lower level of test anxiety (Figure 11).

Among 10- and 15-year-olds, having higher skills in the area of emotional regulation is particularly related to lower levels of test anxiety. Next to being stress-resistant, being optimistic and in control of one's emotions appear to reduce students' feelings of test anxiety in most cities.

Figure 11. Skills most strongly associated with test anxiety in Istanbul (Turkey)

Change in 15-year-olds' test anxiety associated with changes in social and emotional skills



Note: *The figure shows coefficients from a regression of students' test anxiety on (standardised) scores on social and emotional skill scales. Only significant and lasso-selected relationships are reported. The international reference is the arithmetic average of the coefficients across the cities with significant and lasso-selected relationships only. All models include controls for socio-economic status and gender.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A3.20.*

Students' social and emotional skills are related to students' background characteristics...

SSES data and past research show that students' social and emotional skills are important for students' academic success, employment outcomes and well-being as well as for the prosperity of societies in general. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 4.7 advocates:

> ***"ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".***

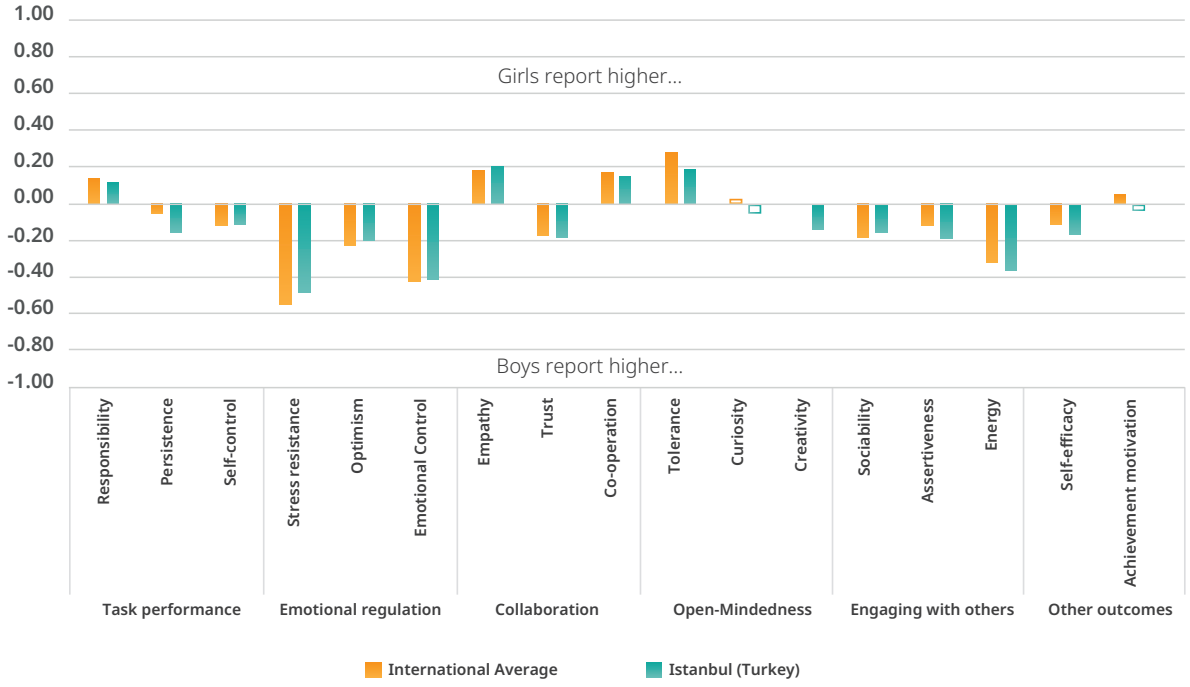
In this context, social and emotional skills such as co-operation, empathy and tolerance are key for citizens and societies to achieve these goals and secure the basis for functioning democracies. However, students with different background characteristics tend to possess different combinations of social and emotional skills.

In Istanbul (Turkey) as in all participating cities, boys exhibit higher skills in the domains of emotional regulation (stress resistance, optimism and emotional control) and engaging with others (sociability, assertiveness, energy). Likewise, girls exhibit higher levels of responsibility, empathy, co-operation, and tolerance. Overall, gender differences in students' social and emotional skills in Istanbul are close to the international average. In addition, both in Istanbul and on average across cities, gender differences in students' social and emotional skills seem to increase with age as they tend to be more pronounced among 15-year-olds than 10-year-olds. The increase in gender gap as students age is mainly in favour of boys. (Figure 12). Some gender differences also change direction as students age; while they are more favourable for girls at age 10, they become more favourable for boys at age 15. For example, 10-year-old girls reported higher levels of self-control and self-efficacy than boys while it is the opposite at age 15.

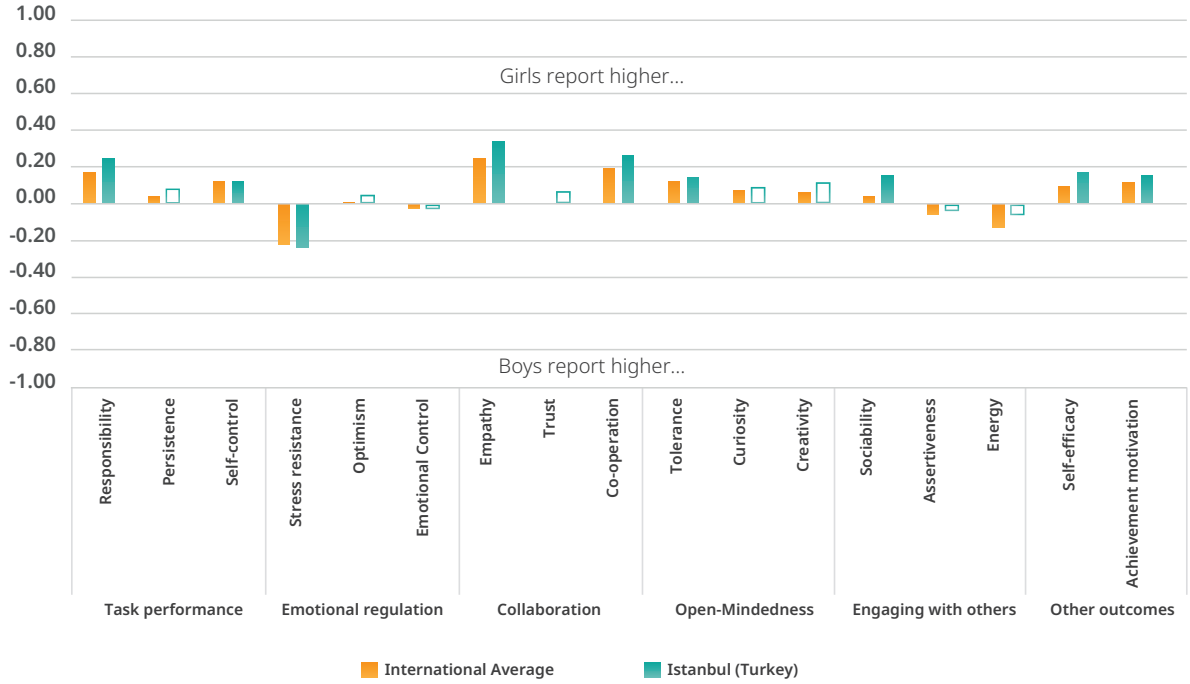
On average across participating cities, socio-economically advantaged students exhibit higher levels on every social and emotional skill measured by SSES. The difference in skills between students with low or high socio-economic status is especially pronounced in skills related to the domain of open-mindedness such as tolerance, curiosity, and creativity as well as empathy, assertiveness and self-efficacy. In Istanbul (Turkey), socio-economic differences are generally less pronounced compared to other cities. There are a number of skills for which no socio-economic difference was found in either of the age cohorts such as responsibility, trust and achievement motivation. Among 15-year-olds, socio-economically disadvantaged students even reported being more cooperative than socio-economically advantaged students. In Istanbul and on average across cities, socio-economic differences in students' social and emotional skills tend to decrease between the ages of 10 and 15 (Figure 13).

Figure 12. Gender differences in social and emotional skills

Standardised gender differences in skill scores (15-year-old girls – 15-year-old boys)



Standardised gender differences in skill scores (10-year-old girls – 10-year-old boys)

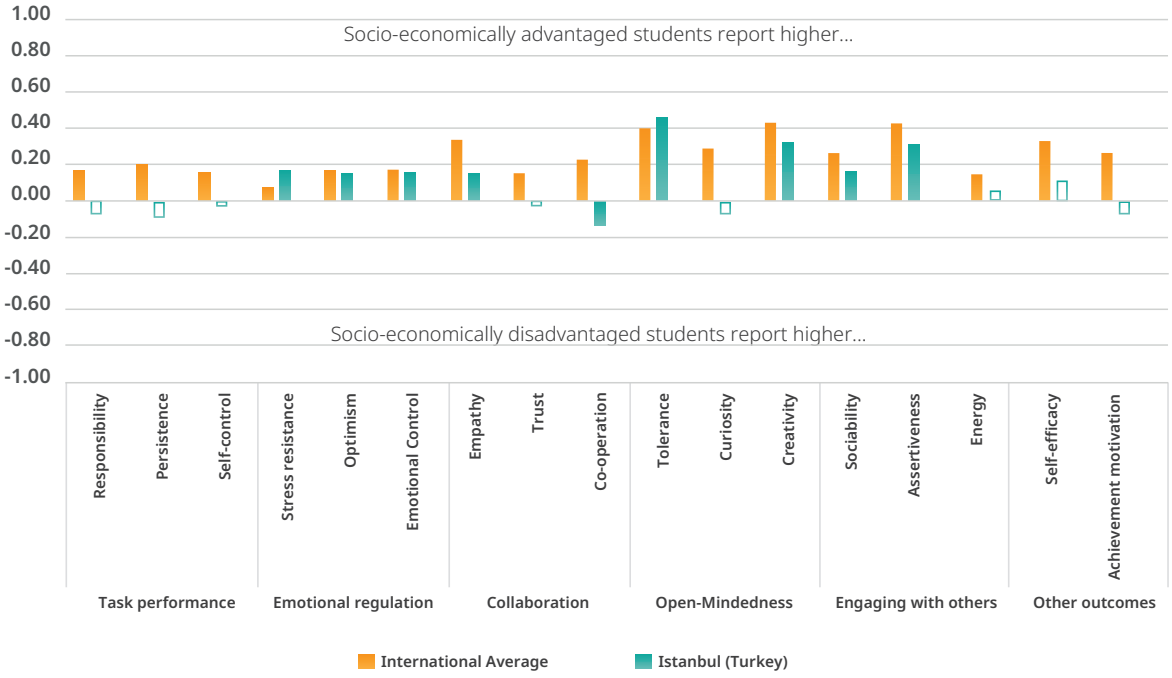


Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages. The figures report standardised differences, whereby the raw scale points have been divided by the (city-specific) standard deviation. Significant differences are coloured, non-significant differences are outlined.*

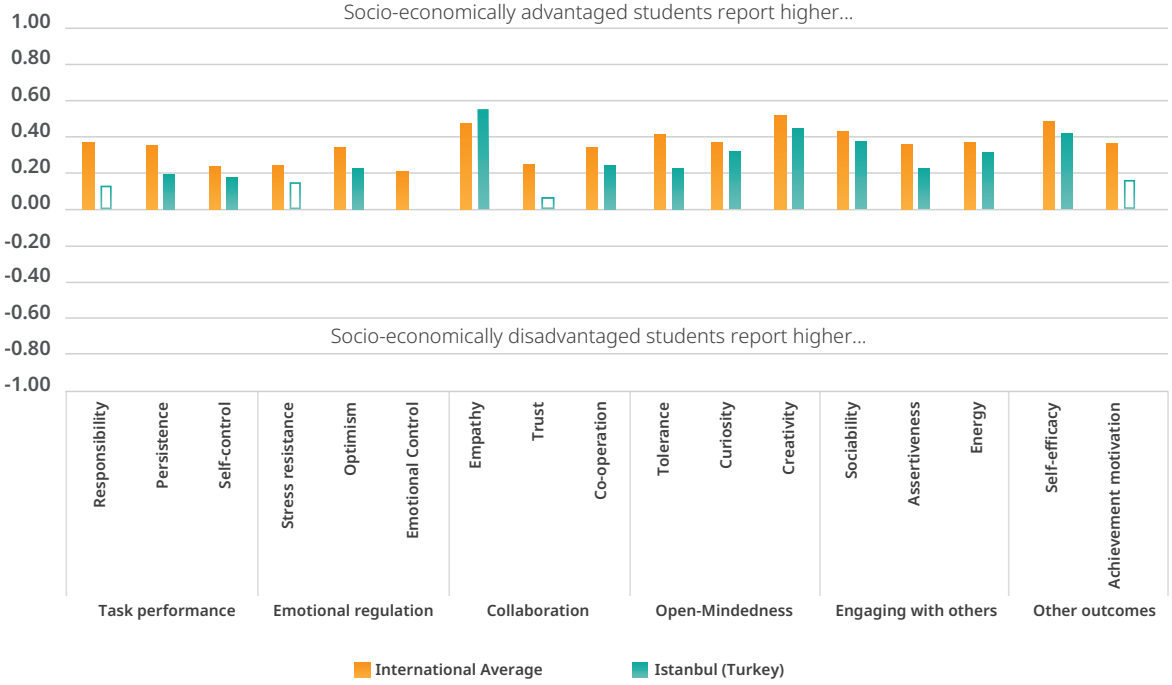
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Tables A1.4, A1.5. and Figure 1.3.*

Figure 13. Differences in social and emotional skills by socio-economic status

Standardised differences in skill scores (high socio-economic status – low socio-economic status) among 15-year-olds



Standardised differences in skill scores (high socio-economic status – low socio-economic status) among 10-year-olds



Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages. Socio-economically advantaged students are those in the top quarter of the city-specific distribution of the index of socio-economic status. Socio-economically disadvantaged students are in the bottom quarter of the city-specific distribution of the index of socio-economic status. The figures report standardised differences, whereby the raw scale points have been divided by the (city-specific) standard deviation. Significant differences are coloured, non-significant differences are outlined.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figures 1.8. and 1.9.*

… But students' social and emotional skills are malleable

Inequalities in social and emotional skills among students are not set in stone. SSES data as well as previous research support the notion that social and emotional skills are characteristics and abilities that are malleable and change with biological and psychological maturation, environmental influences, individual effort and important life events (Specht et al., 2014[12]; Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez, 2019[1]; OECD, 2015[13]; Roberts, Walton and Viechtbauer, 2006[14]).

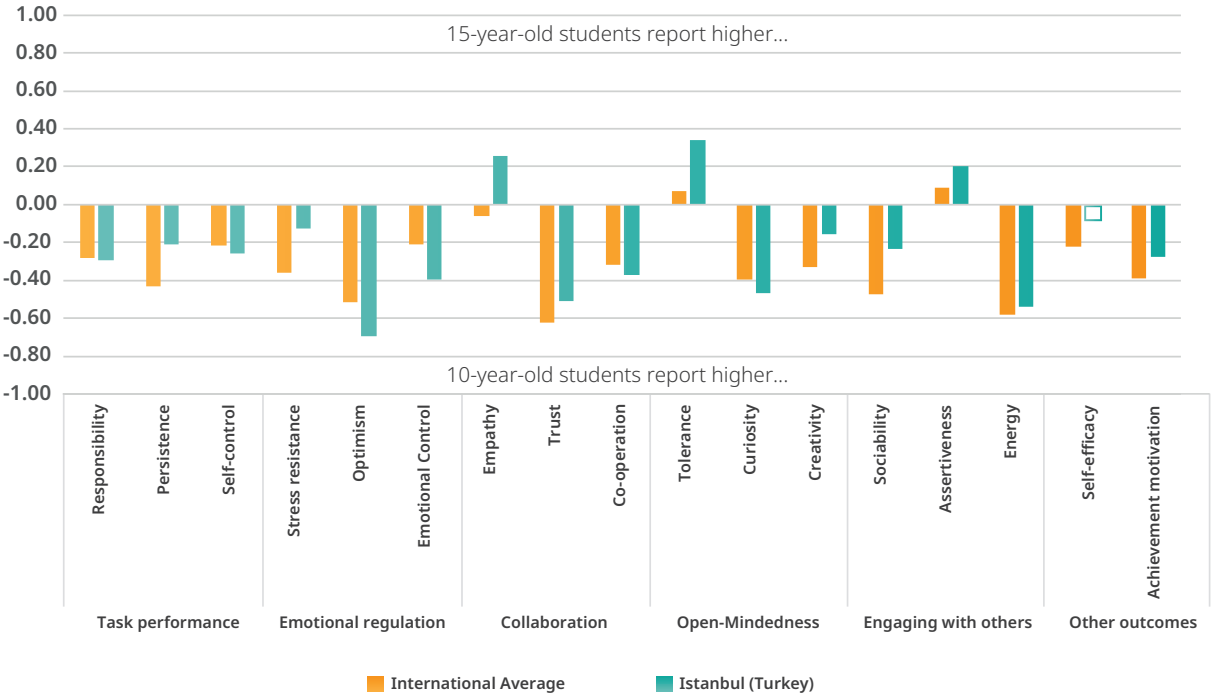
In Istanbul (Turkey) and on average across participating cities, 15-year-olds exhibited lower levels than 10-year-olds for most of the social and emotional skills. The differences are particularly pronounced when it comes to optimism, trust, energy and curiosity. Tolerance, assertiveness and empathy are the only three skills that are reportedly higher among 15-year-olds than 10-year-olds. On the one hand, this might be because teachers and schools are usually more effective at developing these skills. Instruction in citizenship and citizen rights may enhance tolerant attitudes among students. School assignments like oral presentations and written essays may encourage students to develop more assertiveness while interacting with fellow students might help to develop empathy. On the other hand, the longer one spends in school with its fixed learning environments the more students' abilities to build and practise self-regulation skills, interpersonal skills and creativity and curiosity may become inhibited.

Overall, age-related differences in students' social and emotional skills in Istanbul (Turkey) go in the same direction as the other cities, on average. The exception is empathy as 15-year-olds reported higher levels of empathy than 10-year-olds. There are also differences in the magnitude of the relations. For example, age differences in Istanbul appear to be more pronounced for optimism, emotional control, empathy, tolerance and assertiveness but appear less pronounced for other skills (Figure 14).

The dip in students' social and emotional skills as students age is not uniform for all types of students. In particular, the decline is more acute for socio-economically advantaged students, or in other words, less pronounced for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 14. Age differences in social and emotional skills

Differences (15-year-olds – 10-year-olds) in social and emotional skills



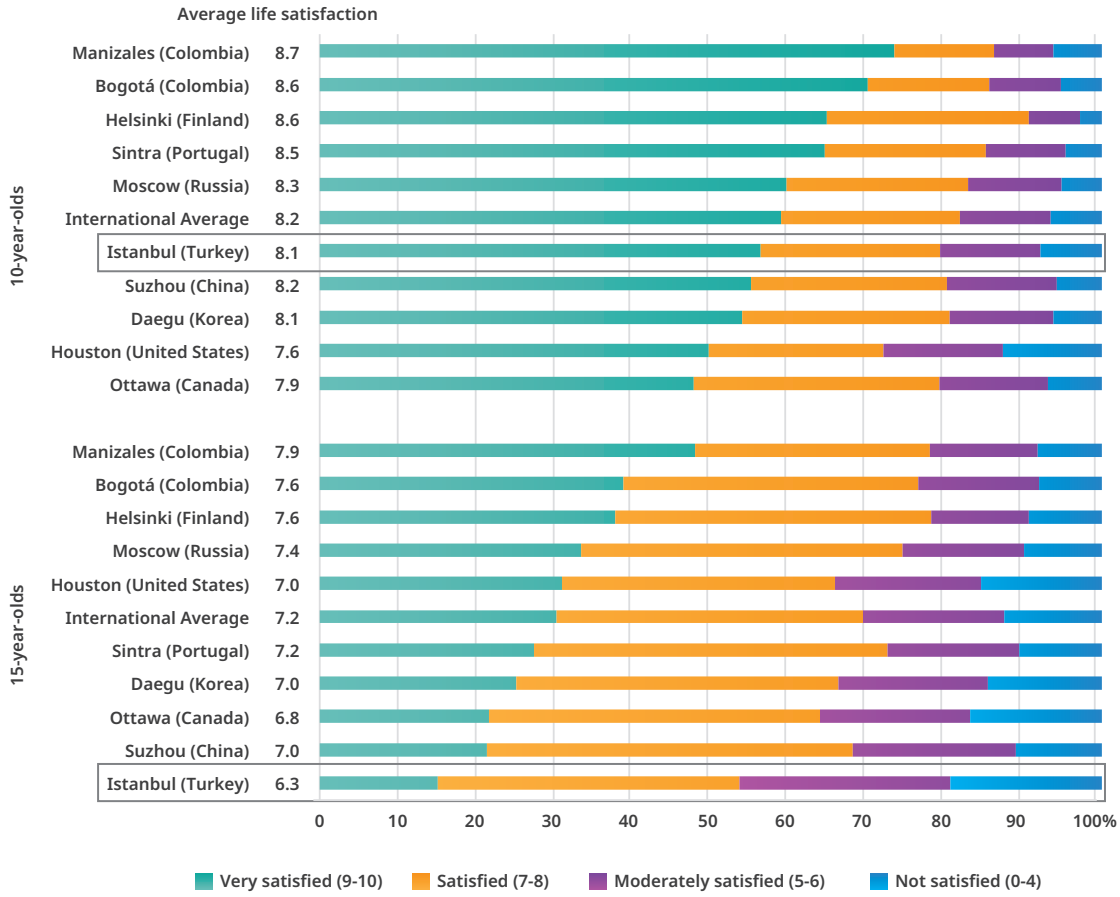
Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages. The figure reports standardised differences, whereby the raw scale points have been divided by the (city-specific) standard deviation. Significant differences are coloured, non-significant differences are outlined.*

Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figure 1.3.*

Important age-related differences are also observed in other key outcomes examined in SSES. SSES data show that 10-year-old students enjoy higher levels of psychological well-being than 15-year-olds. Life satisfaction and current psychological well-being dip as students get older while test anxiety increases from childhood to adolescence. Figure 15 shows, for example, that the share of students who reported being very satisfied with their life in Istanbul (Turkey) goes from over 50% among 10-year-olds down to slightly more than 15% among 15-year-olds. This pattern is generally more pronounced among girls than boys.

Figure 15. Students' life satisfaction, by age cohort and city

Percentage of students, by level of life satisfaction



Note: *Cities are ranked in descending order of the percentage of students who reported being very satisfied with their life.*
Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards.
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figure 3.1.*

Students' educational and occupational expectations also change as they get older. In particular, older students embrace more diverse occupational expectations than their younger peers. On average across cities, 48% of 10-year-olds expect to work in one of the 10 most frequently reported occupations for their age cohort. This goes down to 37% for 15-year-old students. In addition, the relation between students' social and emotional skills, and their occupational expectations is much stronger for 15-year-olds than 10-year-olds. This suggests reciprocal influence between students' social and emotional skills, and their occupational aspirations.

... And students' social and emotional skills can be influenced by the school environment

The malleability of social and emotional skills enables them to be modified or developed for the better. Schools can play a particularly important role in providing learning environments where skills can be developed, enhanced and reinforced through practice and daily experiences. There are a number of studies that look at the effect of different school-based interventions to enhance students' social and emotional learning (Durlak et al., 2011[15]; Park et al., 2008[16]; Sklad et al., 2012[17]; Smithers et al., 2018[18]). A meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2011[15]) shows that social and emotional learning programmes had significant positive effects on targeted social and emotional skills, and attitudes about self, others and school. They increased pro-social behaviour, reduced behavioural problems and improved school performance. A more recent meta-analysis of quality research studies (comprising randomised experimental, quasi-experimental intervention studies and observational studies, controlling for relevant confounding factors) by Smithers et al. (2018[18]) found that interventions aiming to improve social and emotional skills had more obvious positive effects on academic achievement outcomes than on psychological, cognitive, language and health outcomes. These findings suggest that people are not born with a fixed set of social and emotional skills. Instead, there is considerable potential in developing these skills throughout people's lives (Helson et al., 2002[19]; Srivastava et al., 2003[20]). Studies linking data on teachers and students show that teachers have an impact on students' social and emotional skills. Teachers' interactions with students, classroom organisation, and emphasis on critical thinking in specific subjects were found to support students' development in areas beyond their core academic skills (Blazar and Kraft, 2017[21]).

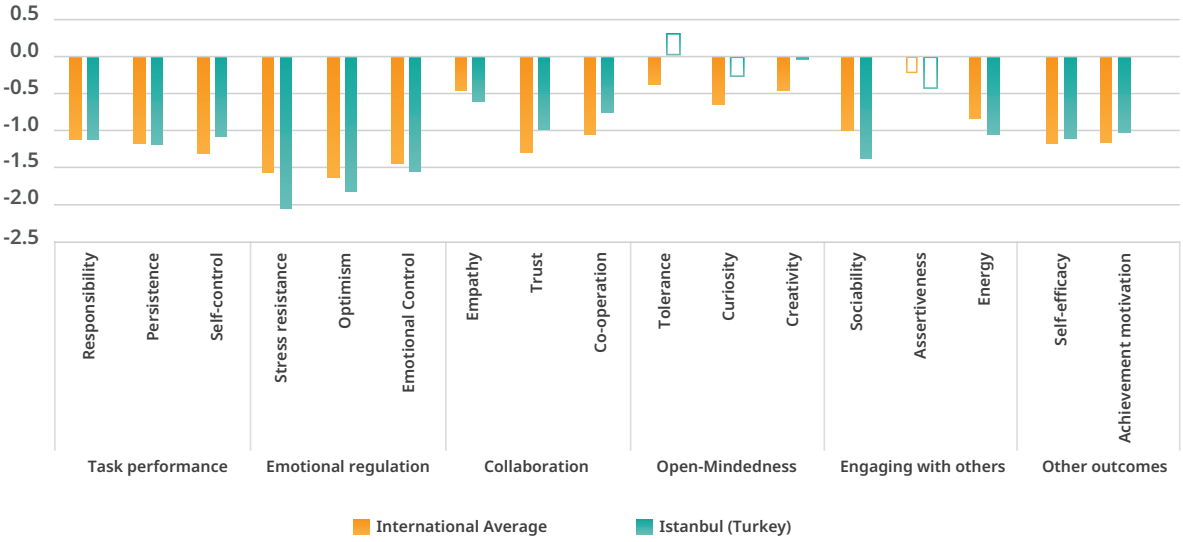
SSES data shed light on teachers' and schools' roles in shaping students' social and emotional skills. A first illustration of this is that students with a greater sense of school belonging and better relations with teachers reported higher social and emotional skills. This holds true for Istanbul (Turkey) and for all other participating cities. Fitting in at school is most strongly related to higher co-operation, optimism and sociability. At the same time, students who reported having positive relations with their teachers also view themselves as more optimistic, curious and achievement-focused. These findings suggest that schools that are able to provide a positive disciplinary climate, offer support from teachers and engage with parents in building a positive school culture can help students develop their social and emotional skills. Indeed, all these factors are positively associated with students' sense of belonging at school by other research studies (Allen et al., 2018[22]; Crouch, Keys and McMahon, 2014[23]; Dotterer, McHale and Crouter, 2007[24]; Ma, 2003[25]; OECD, 2017[26]; Shochet, Smyth and Homel, 2007[27]).

Secondly, school climate and anti-bullying policies can be instrumental to students' positive social and emotional development. Bullying at school can affect any schoolchild in any country (Nansel et al., 2004[28]). This violent behaviour can have severe long-term physical, social and emotional consequences for students. Teachers, parents, policy makers and the media are increasingly drawing attention to bullying and trying to find ways to tackle it (Phillips, 2007[29]). A Korean study established that being bullied in middle school causes the onset of symptoms of psychopathologic behaviours to resurface later (Kim, Leventhal and Koh, 2006[30]). Yet, research suggests that a supportive and caring school environment is linked to less bullying and, conversely, students' willingness to seek help (Låftman, Östberg and Modin, 2017[31]; Ma, 2002[32]; Olweus, 2012[33]). In schools where students perceive greater fairness; feel they fit in at school; work in a more disciplined, structured and cooperative environment; and have understanding teachers, students are less likely to engage in risky and violent behaviour (Gottfredson et al., 2005[34]; Kuperminc, Leadbeater and Blatt, 2001[35]).

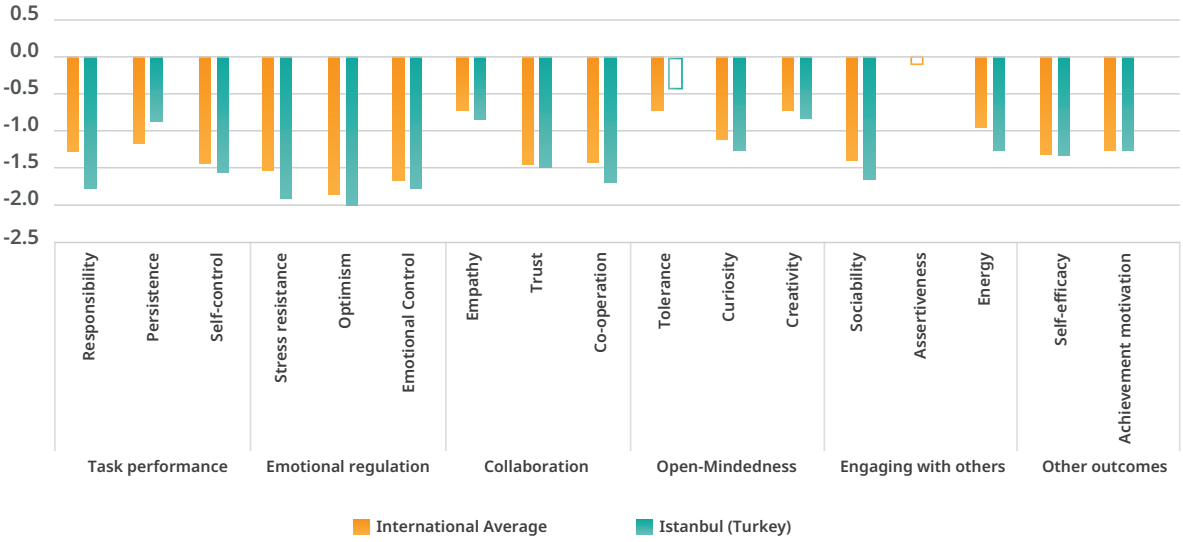
SSES data show that students' exposure to bullying is negatively related to almost all social and emotional skills. In Istanbul (Turkey), as well as on average across participating cities, 10-year-old and 15-year-old students' exposure to bullying is most strongly related to lower skills in the domains of emotional regulation. Students who reported greater exposure to bullying tended to report lower levels of optimism, emotional control, stress resistance, and trust in other people. Particular to Istanbul is that greater exposure to bullying is also related to lower levels of sociability (Figure 16). These findings are particularly worrying as, in Istanbul, 28% of 10-year-old students and 13% of 15-year-old students had experienced bullying at least a few times a month or more during the 12 months prior to the 2019 survey.

Figure 16. Relations between students' exposure to bullying, and social and emotional skills

Change in 15-year-olds' social and emotional skills related to a one-standard deviation increase in exposure to bullying



Change in 10-year-olds' social and emotional skills related to a one-standard deviation increase in exposure to bullying



Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in the international average. Control variables include gender, socio-economic status and immigration background. Significant differences are coloured, non-significant differences are outlined.*

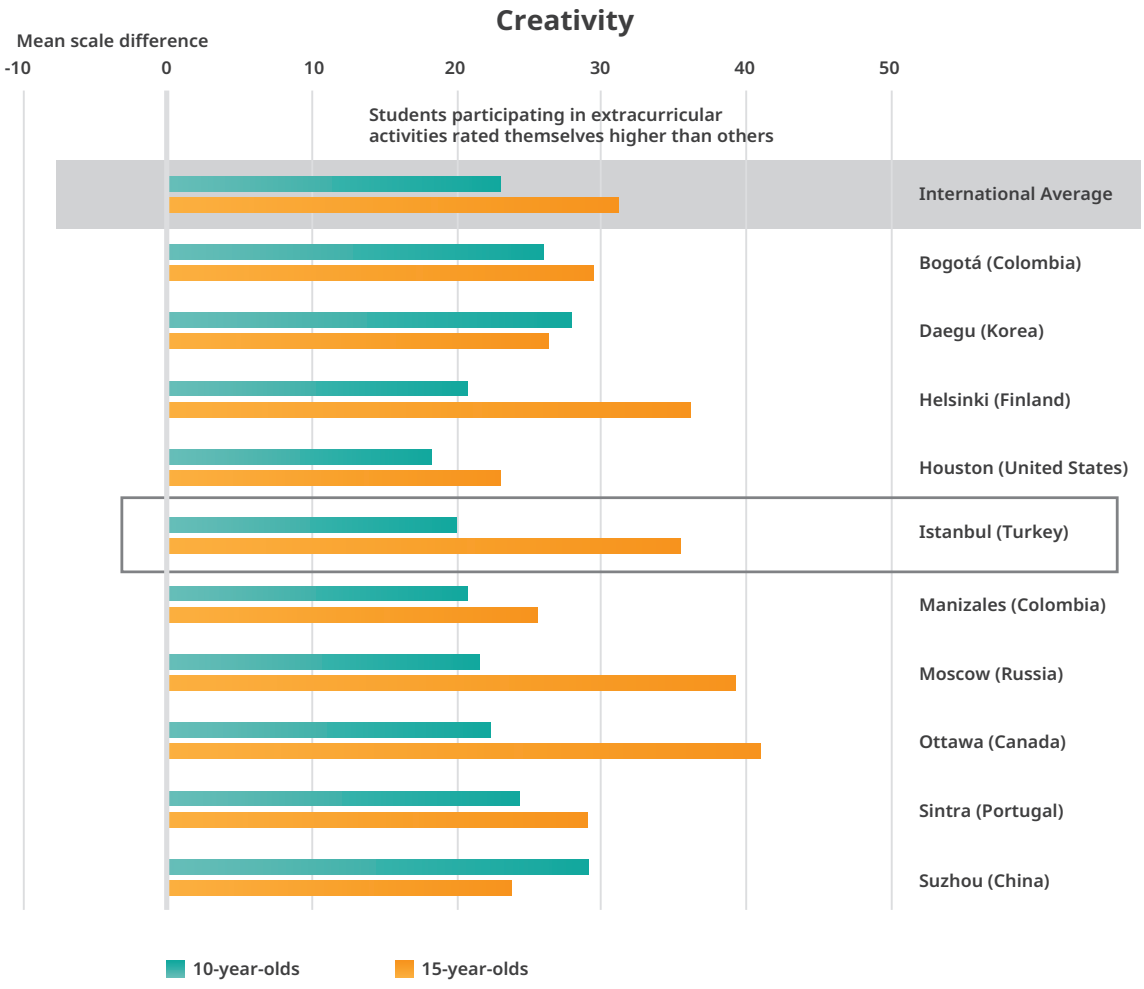
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Table A5.17.*

A third area where schools could make a difference in the holistic development of their students is in organising informal activities. Extracurricular activities at school do not only have an academic focus, they usually aim to achieve a broader set of goals such as physical exercise and health; developing creativity and practice or appreciation of the arts; and encouraging volunteering and involvement with the community. Participation in extracurricular activities can also help students develop social and emotional skills (Farb and Matjasko, 2012[36]).

SSES data show that, in Istanbul (Turkey) as well as in almost all participating cities, students who participate in after-school art activities reported higher levels of creativity, particularly among 15-year-olds (Figure 17). This holds true even after accounting for differences in socio-economic status and gender among students. Differences in creativity levels between 15-year-old students who participate in art activities and those who do not are relatively strong in Istanbul compared to other cities. In Istanbul, 46% of 10-year-old students participate in extracurricular art activities outside of school (e.g. playing a musical instrument, dancing, drawing, etc.) – a share that drops down to 32% among 15-year-old students. The pattern of declining participation in art activities as students age combined with wider differences in creativity levels suggests that students who think of themselves as not creative are more likely to discontinue their participation in art activities during adolescence. Conversely, it is possible that sustained participation in art activities helps students build confidence in their creativity. While the nature of SSES data does not allow us to identify the direction of causality, the data suggest a strong association between art activities at age 15 and creativity.

Figure 17. How participation in art activities relates to creativity

Mean scale differences after accounting for socio-economic status and gender



Note: *Data for Sintra (Portugal) did not reach student response rate standards and are not included in international averages.*
Source: *Adapted from OECD (2021), Beyond Academic Learning. First Results from the Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/92a11084-en, Figure 4.9.*

Box 3. Key features of the OECD's Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES)

Target populations and samples

The SSES took a single snapshot of two cohorts of primary and secondary school students, at ages 10 and 15. A sample of around 3,000 students was drawn for each of the two age groups in each participating city. The sample design consisted of creating an initial random sample of schools, followed by a random selection of students within sampled schools.

Ten cities participated in the first round of SSES in 2019: Bogotá (Colombia), Daegu (Korea), Helsinki (Finland), Houston (United States), Istanbul (Turkey), Manizales (Colombia), Moscow (the Russian Federation), Ottawa (Canada), Sintra (Portugal) and Suzhou (China).

In Istanbul (Turkey), the school samples for both cohorts were stratified by the type of study programmes offered by the schools.

Survey instruments

SSES assessed students' social and emotional skills directly but also obtained information from their parents, teachers and school principals.

SSES's assessment instruments are self- (student) and others' (parents and teachers) reports on assessed students' typical behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Questions/items are in the form of simple statements such as "I like learning new things" (item assessing students' curiosity) and "I stay calm even in tense situations" (item assessing stress resistance). A 5-point Likert-type agree/disagree response scale was used with answers ranging from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree. All of the 15 assessment scales used positively and negatively worded items.

These methods are used the most frequently in social and emotional skills assessments. They provide a simple and efficient way to collect information from a large number of respondents, are cost-efficient, simple to administer and tend to produce consistent results.

SSES also collected information on students' and their parents' background characteristics as well as family, school, and community learning contexts through four contextual questionnaires developed for: students, parents, teachers and school principals.

SSES data of all participating cities were complemented with information on students' school grades (except in Ottawa [Canada]) and students' scores via a short cognitive test (except in Houston [United States] and Ottawa [Canada]).

Administration mode

The students filled out the questionnaires online through desktop or laptop devices. A trained study administrator delivered the survey with school staff present. Parents, teachers and school principals also filled out questionnaires online but in some participating cities, parents could choose a paper and pencil option in case of necessity or personal preference. All instruments were provided using a centrally managed online platform.

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