



Enhancing ESL Learners' Emotional Intelligence Skills through Explicit Emotional Intelligence Instruction

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Abstract: With a rapid awareness about the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in academic achievement these days, the present paper attempts to investigate whether the Emotional Intelligence of ESL learners can be enhanced through EI-based language instruction so that learners can show good language performance. The research sample consisted of 100 ESL learners with mixed levels of learning achievement (or IQ) enrolled in the BS program at the department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. A questionnaire (consisting of 71 items) based on Petrides' (2009) Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire–Short Form and Austin et al.'s (2004) modified version of Schutte et al.'s (1998) and a self-compiled EI-based course were used as research instruments. Following the objectives of the study, a quantitative–cum–experimental research design was adopted to intervene in 100 ESL learners' EI skills by giving them a course on explicit EI-based Language Instruction and measuring their EI skills before and after the intervention with the help of the aforementioned questionnaire. The findings revealed that after taking EI-induced language instruction, there was a significant increase in the EI skills of all participants, irrespective of the level of their learning achievement. However, students with a higher level of learning achievement benefit more from EI instruction as compared to the ones with lower learning achievement.

Introduction

Studies over the past few decades have shown that mere traditional intelligence does not wholly account for the differences in second language achievement among individuals. It is, rather, the psychological and emotional aspects of learners' personalities which also play a great part in determining language behavior (Qanwal & Ghani, 2018). To quote Bradberry and Greaves (2009), it is not education, knowledge, experience or intellectual horsepower that determines why one person succeeds and the other does not. It is rather something else which operates to cause the difference. This intangible power, according to them, is emotional intelligence (EI), also called Emotional Quotient (EQ).

EQ, IQ and Personality

The triangle of EQ, IQ, and personality is often confusing for people. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) assume that EQ is distinct from IQ. Where IQ/Intelligence is defined as a person's ability to learn, EQ is one's ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others and his ability to use this awareness to manage his behaviours and relationships. They perceive that not only are EQ and IQ distinct constructs, but also they seem to have no connection with each other. Thus, a person with the highest levels of IQ does not necessarily possess similar levels of EQ and vice versa. Moreover, both constructs have a different range of flexibility: IQ is a fixed, inborn capacity of a human that cannot be developed, a

feature that remains “the same at age 15 as it is at age 50” (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 18). On the contrary, EQ is a flexible skill which can be learned and developed over time even if one isn’t born with it. The third dimension, i.e. personality, is “the stable style that defines each of us” (p. 18). It includes a person’s individual preferences, which might involve his biological make-up or mental predisposition, e.g. introversion or extroversion personality dimensions. To talk about the range of flexibility, personality is more like IQ than EQ, as it is fixed and remains stable over a lifetime. Personality traits are reflected in a person’s behavior early in life and remain constant throughout. One more similarity between IQ and personality is that, like IQ, it also has no connection with EQ; knowing a person’s personality trait cannot help us predict his level of EQ. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) affirm that a certain dimension of personality, e.g. extroversion, can help to develop EQ but is not complementary to it.

From the above-given analysis, we may infer that to judge a person as a whole, his EQ, IQ, and personality should be assessed all together, as each of the three constructs has its own functionalities in making up the whole picture.

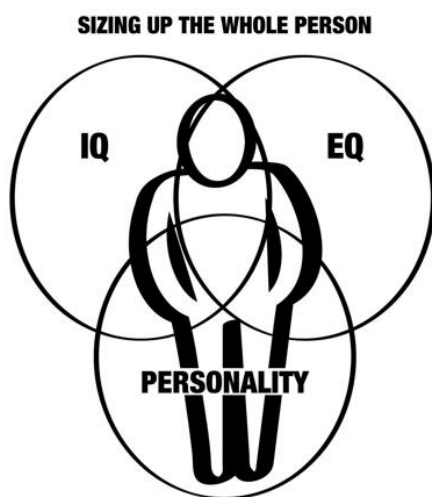


Figure 1: EQ, IQ, and Personality (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 19)

Background of the Study

EI is not a new concept these days. People seem familiar with what it generally means and are commonly seen conversing about it. Still, we find a gap between the popularity of the concept of EI and its practical application in social, academic and workplace settings. The reason for this wide-ranging gap is a twofold misunderstanding among the public: first, that EI is a charisma---an attribute people are rarely blessed with; second, that it is a personality trait which cannot be changed or improved. Therefore, people either haven’t been able to or haven’t ever thought to harness this power. If we observe our surroundings, we may notice that people struggling for ‘self-improvement’ spend most of their energy pursuing education, knowledge, intelligence and experience; they overlook the fact that EI also needs a part of their conscious efforts to develop their personality, and that it can be improved. Although EQ is harder to measure than IQ and difficult to be captured on a resume, its enigmatic power cannot be refuted (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

Bradberry and Greaves (2009) observed that in spite of the increasing focus on EI, a wide-ranging deficit in understanding and monitoring emotions still exists. They report that out of 500,000+ people they tested, only 30% could accurately identify their emotions. This infers that two-thirds of the population is subjected to emotional hijacking. Such people either lack the ability to spot emotions as they occur or are deficient in the skill to use them to their benefit.

Coming to educational institutes, EI is generally not taught in schools. A person enters his work career when he knows only how to read, write and report on his subject knowledge. He does not know how to deal with challenging problems by managing emotions. Even then, he is not given any training on EI by his professionals at the workplace. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) proclaim that understanding one’s self and having mastery of one’s emotions is far more

important than factual knowledge to bring success to a job.

As far as the context of language education is concerned, EI is as important as any other academic discipline. The researchers themselves, being connected with English language learning and teaching for the last seven years in Southern Punjab, have felt that emotional hijacking is one of the major factors responsible for the poor L2 performance of adult learners of this region. They generally observed that despite a good command of the grammatical structures of English, having the required content knowledge, and being familiar with the functional norms associated with English communication, students still show poor performance in English language skills, whether productive or receptive.

Keeping this in view, the researchers felt the need to investigate whether the EI of ESL university students can be increased, and henceforth, to put efforts to bring an improvement in the overall scenario of poor L2 learning performance by elevating students' present levels of EI and giving them explicit instruction on EI skills.

Research Objectives

Hence, the research caters to the following general objectives:

1. To know the present level of Pakistani ESL learners' emotional intelligence skills at the post-graduate level
2. To know if delivering a course on emotional intelligence instruction can help to raise the level of ESL learners' emotional intelligence.

1.4. Hypothesis

Corresponding to the aforementioned objectives, a null hypothesis was formulated:

H. Learners' emotional intelligence cannot be enhanced through emotionally induced language instruction.

Significance of the Study

The study is important because it has entertained the idea of EQ in comparison with the traditional, well-known, and most discussed the concept of IQ in L2 success. The study has exposed that apart from the learner's cognitive ability, his individual difference variables, his linguistic competence, and his teacher's teaching capability etc., there are many other factors lurking actively beneath the overall process of learning to influence his L2 performance. In pursuance of this analysis, the study points out how emotionally intelligent behavior is needed to tackle these issues in the best possible way. The study has proposed a course of EI instruction for teaching speaking skills to ESL learners, keeping in mind their psychological-cum-emotional states, which determine a learner's verbal and non-verbal behaviour while performing in L2. Thus, the study provides a key for teachers and curriculum designers to make ESL learners manage their emotional-cum-psychological issues and behaviours, which influence their L2 performance.

Previous Research

EI and Academic Performance

Hj, Hashim and Nor ([2009](#)) conducted a study on 399 secondary school students in Malaysia and concluded that EI significantly correlates with academic success. Many other studies in different countries, for example, Hogan *et al.* (2010) and Qualter *et al.* ([2012](#)), have also shown that EI is a predictor of academic success. Additionally, Holt ([2007](#)) observed a significant positive relationship between educational success and emotional reasoning. Similarly, Nelson ([2009](#)) found that learners who have the ability to express themselves well and can appreciate others' emotions achieve higher grades than those with a lower level of emotional ability. Downey *et al.*'s ([2008](#)) and Salleh's ([2009](#)) studies proposed that EI correlates significantly with academic success in Mathematics and Science.

Besides these correlation-based studies, there are studies which have adopted experimental research designs to explore the role of EI in academic performance. One such study was conducted by Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012), which followed a quasi-experimental paradigm for identifying the effect of an EI-based intervention program on students' EI skills and academic achievement. Statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test scores of control and experimental groups was done, which revealed a significant increase in the EI skills of experimental group participants. The results of the independent samples t-test also concluded that the academic achievement of the experimental group participants increased to a far greater degree as compared to that of the control group participants. In light of these findings, Nwadinigwe and Azuka-Obieke (2012) inferred that being more emotional brings forth positive academic behavior, which helps in improving academic performance. Similarly, an empirical study by Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Wallberg (2004) also demonstrated that undertaking an EI-based program can positively enhance students' academic success.

Can EI be Enhanced?

Rouhani (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental study which concluded with the positive effects of a cognitive-affective course on emotional intelligence, foreign language anxiety and empathy of Iranian EFL learners.

The results of Abdolrezapour's (2013) experimental study disclosed that EFL learners' EI could be improved by teaching through emotionally driven literary content in the classroom.

Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012) conducted an experimental study on 60 students learning a course on English as a foreign language in Iran to see the effects of literature-based activities on students' EI. Using a pretest-posttest research design with 30 items each, they came to know that

literature has the capacity to enhance L2 learners' EI skills.

Keeping the aforementioned studies in view, the researchers felt the need to explore the phenomenon of EI in the academic context of English language teaching. They planned to investigate if the EI of ESL learners can also be improved through EI instruction. As per the researchers' knowledge, not much literature is available regarding the enhancement of EI in the English language teaching context, especially in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a quantitative research paradigm and entails an experimental mode of investigation to explore if explicit EI instruction can enhance ESL learners' Emotional Intelligence skills.

Research Sample

A group of 100 participants studying English as a second language in the BS program at the department of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, were selected as the research sample. The participants included learners with mixed learning abilities varying from average to excellent levels of learning achievement in their previous class/exam.

Research Instruments

The research tools in the present study included an EI questionnaire and a course on EI-based language instruction. The questionnaire (comprising 71 items in total) was compiled by combining Petrides' (2009) Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form and Austin et al.'s (2004) modified version of Schutte et al.'s (1998) EI measure. The rationale behind using the combination of these two different EI inventories was to bring learners' all types of emotional intelligence skills into focus, i.e. Trait EI (personality-based emotional behaviours and predispositions) and ability EI (performance-

based cognitive-cum-emotional behaviours). Next, after an in-depth study and discussion with the language experts and English language course instructors from 4 different universities in Punjab, Pakistan, the researchers developed a course on emotional intelligence for language instruction. This course was taught to the sample ESL learners. The course was designed keeping in view the communicative and emotional needs of university students inside and outside the classroom. The following books were consulted for content selection, formal lectures, activities and strategies for instruction.

- Teaching emotional intelligence: Strategies and activities for helping students make effective choices (2nd ed.) by Lewkowicz, (2007)
- The emotional intelligence curriculum: a journey towards emotional Literacy by Cornwell and Bundy (2009)
- Developing Children's Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills by Csoti, (2009)

The contents of the EI course for the present study were chosen collectively from the above-given books in accordance with the learners' language needs. However, the activities, classroom materials and topics for classroom discussion were modified in line with the grade level of the participants, i.e. postgraduate level, and also in accordance with the research context, research site, region and culture of research participants.

The course was designed on the pattern of 48 credit hours divided into 32 lectures of 1 hour and 30 minutes each. Two sessions per week were conducted. Besides explicit formal instruction on various aspects of emotional intelligence, the participants were made to participate in different individual, pair and group activities in the classroom. Additionally, they were also assigned various emotion-based tasks to perform outside the classroom as homework, e.g. keeping a diary, reading some particular material, sorting out some reading stuff, video or audio to be discussed

in class, and interacting with other people in off-class timings etc.

Research Procedure

The data collection procedure involved the following stages. Initially, all of the participants were asked to fill in the EI questionnaire so that their overall EI skills could be measured. Next, participants were given explicit EI-induced language instruction for a period of 6 months, i.e. one semester. After the implementation of the EI course on the participants, they all were made to respond to the two EI questionnaires again so that their overall EI scores could be measured after they had been given the EI-based language instruction. The last stage of data collection involved the division of the participants with regard to their learning ability (considered parallel to their IQ) into three groups, i.e. average ability, good ability and excellent ability groups. This was done by considering the participants' final overall grades obtained in the previous semester of their study program. The rationale behind dividing the groups for analysis of data was to make IQ level a constant variable for calculating the extent of increase (if any) in the participants' emotional intelligence skills.

Data Analysis and Findings

Initially, the participants' EI scores were calculated in response to the questionnaire data before giving EI-induced language instruction. This is henceforth termed pre-EI score. Next, after giving them EI language instruction, the participants' EI skills were measured again, which were considered as their post-EI scores. The following step required the researchers to analyze whether there was an improvement in the EI skills of the participants after the intervention, i.e. after attending the course on EI-induced language instruction.

For this purpose, the researcher applied paired samples t-test to compare the EI scores of the participants before and after the intervention. It is important to note that the researchers

compared pre and post-EI scores of different learning ability groups separately so that the learning achievement (IQ level) of the

participants may not affect the results of the analysis. Sections 4.1-4.4 present the findings.

Improvement in EI skills of Average Ability Group Participants

Table 1.

Pre and post-EI mean scores (average ability group)

Paired Samples Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre Emotional Intelligence	196.03	30	39.24	7.16
Post Emotional Intelligence	266.93	30	32.79	5.99
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 51%-60% (Average)				

The results of table 1 depict that for the participants with the average level of learning ability (51-60% marks), the average score of pre-emotional intelligence is found to be 196.03 with a standard deviation of 39.24. The standard error of the mean is 7.16. The mean score of post-emotional Intelligence is 266.93, with a standard deviation of 32.79 and a standard error of a mean

of 5.99. This infers that for this group, there is a considerable increase (average of 70.90 points) in overall mean emotional intelligence scores after they received emotional intelligence instruction. Hence, emotional intelligence instruction has a positive impact on the EI scores of the average ability group.

Table 2.

The difference in pre and post-EI mean scores (average ability group)

Paired Samples Test ^a								
Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-Emotional Intelligence - Post-Emotional Intelligence	-70.90	35.40	6.46	-84.12	-57.68	-10.970	29	.000
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 51%-60% (Average)								

Table 2 communicates that when we compare the mean scores obtained in pre and post-EI, it is found that for the participants with average learning achievement (51-60% marks), the post-EI is significantly greater than the pre-trait EI as a value of t-test statistic is -10.97 with p-value

0.000 which indicates that there is a highly significant difference between these two EI scores. This suggests that emotional intelligence instruction has significantly increased the participants' level of cumulative emotional intelligence skills.

Improvement in EI of Good Ability Group Participants**Table 3.***Pre and post-EI mean scores (good ability group)*

Paired Samples Statistics ^a				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre Emotional Intelligence	203.34	32	37.72	6.67
Post Emotional Intelligence	283.53	32	36.99	6.54
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 61%-70% (Good)				

The findings of table 3 reveal that for the participants having good learning ability (61-70% marks), the average score of overall pre-emotional intelligence is 203.34 with a standard deviation of 37.72 and standard error of the mean of 6.67, while their average score for post emotional intelligence is 283.53 with a standard

deviation of 36.99 and standard error of mean 6.54. This denotes that in the case of participants with good learning ability, the level of emotional intelligence has considerably increased with an average of 80.19 points when learning ability is kept constant for the group.

Table 4.*The difference in pre and post-EI mean scores (good ability group)*

Paired Samples Test ^a								
Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-Emotional Intelligence - Post-Emotional Intelligence	-80.19	28.70	5.07	-90.53	-69.84	-15.81	31	.000
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 61%-70% (Good)								

The paired samples test results for the good learning ability group (61-70% marks) given in table 4 demonstrate that there is a significant increase in participants' emotional intelligence scores as the value of t-test statistics is -15.813, with a p-value of 0.000 which implies a highly

significant difference between their pre and post emotional intelligence scores. This entails that emotional intelligence instruction has positively improved the overall emotional intelligence level skills of this group (mean difference = 80.19).

Improvement in EI of Excellent Ability Group Participants

Table 5.

Pre and post-EI mean scores (excellent ability group)

Paired Samples Statistics ^a				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre Emotional Intelligence	214.24	38	29.80	4.15
Post Emotional Intelligence	303.40	38	30.84	5.00
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 71%-90% (Very Good/Excellent)				

Table 5 presents the average pre and post-emotional intelligence scores of the third group of participants having very good learning ability (71-90% marks). For this group, the average pre-emotional intelligence score is 214.24 with a standard deviation of 29.80 and a standard error

of the mean of 4.15, while the average post-EI score is 303.40 with a standard deviation of 30.84 and a standard error of the mean of 5.00. Hence, there is again a considerable improvement (average of 89.16 points) in overall emotional intelligence scores.

Table 6.

The difference in pre and post-EI mean scores (excellent ability group)

Paired Samples Test ^a								
Paired Differences								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-Emotional Intelligence - Post-Emotional Intelligence	-89.16	35.18	5.71	-100.72	-77.60	-15.62	37	.000
Learning Ability (% Marks) = 71%-90% (Very Good/excellent)								

Table 6 shows that when we compare the average score of pre and post-EI of a very good learning ability group, it is found that the post-EI score is highly greater than the pre-EI score. The value for t-test statistics is -15.62 with a p-value of 0.000 which highlights a very significant difference between both scores. It means that the overall emotional intelligence of this group has significantly increased with emotional intelligence instruction. The difference is, on average, 89.16 points.

Comparing the Improvement in EI Scores of Different Learning Ability Groups

Having found that there is a significant improvement in EI skills of all three learning ability groups after taking the course on EI-induced language instruction, the researchers made a comparison of the extent of improvement in EI skills of different learning ability groups after the intervention. Figure 2 below shows the findings:

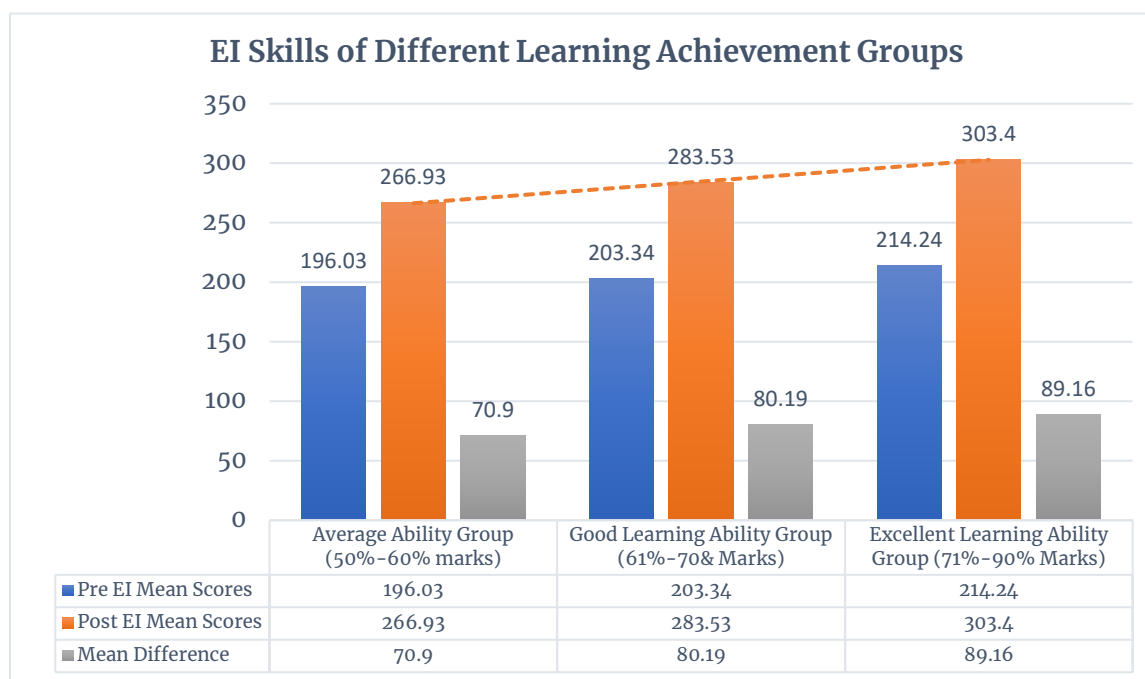


Figure 2: Comparing the increase in EI skills of different learning achievement groups

Figure 2 evidently reveals that there is a significant increase in EI skills of all types of learning achievement groups of participants. However, the mean difference in pre and post-EI scores of the excellent ability group of participants (Mean Difference = 89.16) is greater than any of the other two groups, i.e. good ability (mean difference = 80.19) and average ability groups (mean difference = 70.9).

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reveal that there is a highly significant difference between pre and post-trait EI scores of average, good and excellent ability groups. However, the difference is the largest for the excellent ability group. The higher the learning ability (IQ), the higher the difference in pre and post-EI of learners [average ability group (mean difference = 35.07 points); good ability group (mean difference = 39.03 points); and excellent ability group (mean difference = 51.95 points)].

This means that EI instruction is the most advantageous for increasing the trait EI of

learners with the highest IQ levels. And it has cast the lowest effects on the trait EI of learners with the lowest IQ levels. However, EI instruction positively impacts trait EI of all learner groups irrespective of their IQ levels.

The same is the case for ability EI. There is a highly significant difference between pre and post-ability EI scores of all learning ability (IQ) groups. However, the difference is greatest for the good ability group [average ability group (mean difference = 35.83); good ability group (mean difference = 41.16); and excellent ability learners (mean difference = 37.21)]. This means that EI instruction has the most of its impact on the ability EI of learners with a medium level of IQ.

In the case of overall EI, there is a highly significant difference between pre and post-EI of learners of all three ability groups [average ability group (mean difference = 70.90 points); good ability group (mean difference = 80 points); excellent ability group (mean difference = 89.16 points)]. Again, in terms of overall EI skills, the highest IQ learners have benefitted from the EI instruction the most, and vice versa.

This may suggest that IQ works parallel to EQ. In other words, learners' IQ facilitates understanding the nature of EI skills and practically developing these skills in themselves. This is a unique finding in its place which may add to the knowledge of EQ, IQ and L2 learning literature. However, the researcher believes that this point needs to be further validated through some more empirical research.

Nonetheless, the general conclusion is that EI can be enhanced through EI instruction. This stands in line with the results of studies like Rouhani (2008), Abdolrezapour (2013), and Abdolrezapour and Tavakoli (2012), which concluded that EFL learners' EI could be augmented by giving them instruction on EI skills.

Hence, the null hypothesis that learners' emotional intelligence cannot be enhanced through emotionally induced language instruction is rejected.

To conclude, EI instruction can significantly enhance ESL learners' EI skills irrespective of their IQ level. However, the instruction is most advantageous for augmenting the overall EI of the highest IQ level (very good learning achievement) participants. The higher the IQ level of L2 learners, the more effective EI instruction is in developing their EQ. However, it is confirmed that in all cases, EI instruction does improve learners' EQ levels.

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