

Contribution to Language Teaching and Learning: A Review of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to introduce the importance of emotional intelligence and the extent to which emotional intelligence can be implemented and used to improve language teaching and learning. Since emotional intelligence is perceived to play a crucial part in every aspect of people's lives, it can be extended to language teaching and learning. Language teaching and learning typically includes communication; therefore, emotional intelligence is beneficial. Emotional intelligence is still not widely known, used, or studied in the world of language teaching and learning, although increased efforts to popularise this term have occurred in the past two decades. For this to be achievable in language teaching and learning, scholars and researchers need to pay attention to emotional intelligence. Therefore, both language teachers and students should be aware of and cooperate together to improve emotional intelligence and to create a more effective learning atmosphere for language teaching and learning.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, language teaching, teachers, students, language learning

1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is not a new notion and has actually been around since 1990 in the theory and research of different forms of psychology. Prior to 1970, research interests focused solely on cognition and intelligence testing, since psychologists analysed intelligence as a measurable ability to solve cognitive problems (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000). However, in the twentieth century, theorists like Thorndike (1920), Wechsler (1972), and Gardner (1983), have challenged these purely cognitive approaches. Thorndike presented the idea of social intelligence, which he presented as a separate form of intelligence from mechanical and abstract. Thorndike suggested that social ability was an important factor of intelligence and that it is through the ability to understand, influence, and manage other people. A half a century later, Wechsler (1972) also examined this idea further and suggested additional forms of intelligence that complemented cognitive forms: (a) emotional, (b) personal, and (c) social. Gardner (1983) also viewed non-cognitive forms of intelligence as being important. These forms include intrapersonal intelligence, the ability to understand one's own emotions, and interpersonal intelligence, the ability to have a good relationship with others (Hedlund & Sternberg, 2000). This concept of non-intellective aspects of general intelligence was thus introduced an essential direction to the definition of emotional intelligence (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Mayer & Cobb, 2000).

Combining both intelligence and emotion, Mayer and Salovey (1990) were the first to use the phrase emotional intelligence and defined it as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's feelings and actions" (p. 189). However, in 1997, Mayer and Salovey reconstructed their model and described four hierarchical types of abilities: (a) the ability to access or generate feeling so as to facilitate thought, (b) the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge, (c) the ability to regulate emotions, and (d) the ability to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Mayer and Salovey (1997) considered emotional intelligence a factor of measuring people's intelligence.

There are also different views as to how emotional intelligence can be described. Goleman (1995), who popularised emotional intelligence with the public, claimed emotional intelligence as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathise and to hope. Goleman's perspective on

emotional intelligence included factors that concerned (a) self-awareness, (b) self-regulation, (c) motivation, (d) empathy, and (e) social skills. Self-awareness is described as recognising one's own feelings and knowing how to factor feelings into decision-making in a highly effective way. Self-regulation implies the ability to be emotionally stable and to manage one's feelings in a positive manner. Motivation allows for the recognition of wants and channels that in a desired direction. Empathy allows for the sensing of other people's feelings, to understand their desires and needs, and to act accordingly. Social skills are the ability to handle interrelationships and have excellent leadership skills. These definitions clearly show emotional intelligence to have two relations of self, intrapersonal and interpersonal. This can be simply put as (a) a relation with one's inner self (internal relation) and (b) a relation with others (external relation). Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) have differing opinions about emotional intelligence. It is described as having the ability to adapt to an environment successfully, socially, physically and mentally. Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) similarly described five key elements. Bar-On alternatively described emotional intelligence and stressed (a) intrapersonal ability, (b) interpersonal ability, (c) adaptability, (d) stress management, and (e) general mood. In Bar-On's model (1997), intrapersonal ability is described as emotional self-awareness, confidence, a clear vision of oneself, self-actualisation, and the ability to be independent. Interpersonal ability was described as one's ability to empathise and to maintain relationships and social responsibilities. Adaptation was the ability find solutions and to be flexible. Stress management emphasised balance and control of one's feelings. Finally, general mood was the ability to recognise feelings and to be positive.

Theorists and scholars view emotional intelligence with slight variation, although it is usually agreed upon that emotional intelligence is the ability to intelligently control ones emotions as well as work with the emotions of others. Positive results derive from the ability to ethically and intelligently know, control and encourage oneself, to be able to feel empathy for others while interpreting and understanding their feelings, and to achieve one's goals. That is similar to Ciarrochi, Chan, and Cuputi (2000) commented in a review of the emotional intelligence literature that "while the definitions of emotional intelligence are often varied for different researchers, they nevertheless tend to be complementary rather than contradictory" (p. 540).

2. Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Learning Languages

With the media attention, a high level of interest across language teaching and learning also developed, as there are some research studies conducted to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and language performance (see Sucaromana, 2004). The extent to which emotional intelligence can be implemented and used to improve language teaching and learning needs consideration. One question that can be asked is, are intelligent people more successful at learning languages? When learning languages, the interaction between the teacher and learner is important for both communication and the physiological aspects between the two. An important factor in learning languages is the ability to be emotionally intelligent by showing the capacity to recognise, employ, comprehend, and manage emotions. These characteristics are much more important than simply being intelligent. Every genius is not guaranteed to become successful in life, and vice versa; the possession of a high IQ rating is not the sole indicator when it comes to being successful in all fields (Goleman, 1995). It is even claimed that emotional intelligence is a more important key to success, and not cognitive intelligence, more accurately predicts success in school.

The importance of emotional intelligence, especially, is often ignored. However, students learning a second/foreign language look for and need emotional intelligence, between the teacher and themselves and whether in the classroom or at a more personal level. Beginners need and ask for tolerance and patience as well as an understanding from their teachers and fellow classmates. Sometimes, the views of the teacher can make a student behave badly in the classroom, a behaviour that was created by the teacher's own doing. In the world of teaching English as a second/ foreign language, emotional intelligence is still not widely known, used, or studied although increased efforts to popularise this term have occurred in the past two decade.

As previously stated, emotional intelligence involves the innate ability of a person and can be improved by external factors such as the environment and experience. As area of study, emotion and intelligence are tied together because emotion is viewed to contribute to the ability to think intelligently. Therefore, the capacity for empathy and the consideration of other peoples' emotions would be the components of a balanced and emotionally intelligent person. People who are lacking in these skills will be at a disadvantage and will suffer socially and emotionally. It can be said that emotional intelligence will help well-being, creativity, and for people to be better students (Goleman, 1995).

Mayer and Salovey suggested the following ideas for using emotional intelligence with education in the classroom: (a) express feelings instead of ordering the students to stop when they misbehave, (b) take

responsibility for feelings instead of imposing them one-sidedly on your students, (c) be much more aware of feelings than the feelings of the students, (d) try to understand the reasons behind students' behaviour before forming an opinion about them, (e) find ways of voluntary cooperation instead of making demands of students, and (f) help students to express themselves openly and to solve any problems they may have.

For second/ foreign language teaching and other educational fields that usually include interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence is beneficial. Since language classes are based on communication, it should be recognised that empathy is an important basic element of effective communication. It seems as though developing emotional intelligence in education systems would be beneficial, because emotional intelligence can increase effective communication and learning in the classroom. It is also necessary that both second/ foreign language teachers and students cooperate to improve emotional intelligence and to create a more effective learning atmosphere; the sharing of cultures and ideologies can then happen successfully. Increasing abilities in second/ foreign language teaching can be through the creation of an atmosphere of communication and personal sharing.

3. Emotional Intelligence and Students

Emotional intelligence and achievement in second/ foreign language learning has some direct and indirect links with support for the direct link. For instance, it is thought that emotions can either increase or suppress attention, which has an effect on the learning and retaining of information (Sylwester, 1998). Thus, it can be said that emotions can affect one's learning either positively or negatively. It was observed that negativity tended to be a hindrance in students' thoughts while writing (Kearney 1998), while Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) noted that the positive thinking and emotions greatly improved the retention of new information and learning by keeping attention during the task.

Elliot (2003) mentioned with strong evidence that when interpersonal skills are gained, learning can be enhanced. Gardner (1983) and Bar-On (2000) also mentioned interpersonal skills as being a part of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has positive effects on students because they can manage their emotions and have more positive communication and confidence in themselves, other classmates, and teachers.

Emotional intelligence will promote good study behaviour, and make the learning experience more effective. Moreover, the attitudes of an educational place can motivate everyone involved, with positive thinking causing positive results (Ellis, 1985). Elliot (2003) suggested that encouragement was a factor in the outcome and study habits of students. Positive encouragement would therefore show good results in the student, and those who were engaged would develop positive attitudes toward learning. Emotional intelligence can be quite practical in the classroom. Where students are underperforming, teachers can find a way to promote emotionally intelligent practices. Teachers can assess the students based on their emotional intelligence prior to a class or course, as well as afterward. The students' second/ foreign language achievements will be enhanced, as they will be able to improve on their intrapersonal and interpersonal relations and skills.

Emotional intelligence is among one of the variables that further shapes a student's language learning context, although academic achievement is also a matter of cognitive ability. Emotional intelligence also creates effective family encouragement, study atmosphere, and English achievement. Emotional intelligence seems like a concept worth investing in. Those with high emotional intelligence are at a great advantage. Evidence shows that underlying emotional capabilities are the roots of ethical stances in life (Goleman, 1995). Goleman feels that a new vision or perception of education would be to educate the student wholly, both in mind and heart. Sucaramana (2004) looked at the relationship between different variables that could affect English achievement in Thai students. The findings showed that emotional intelligence had a direct effect through study habits, participation, effort, and encouragement by family and peers. It seems as though most of the literature focuses on the emotional intelligence of the student, but what about the teacher? Is it not equally important that the teacher have developed emotional intelligence?

4. Emotional Intelligence and Teachers

It would be beneficial if teachers were aware of their own emotions and emotional intelligence in addition to that of the students. Emotional intelligence stimulates learning in many ways and improves language retention. Also, it is suggested that emotional intelligence can fill in the missing parts when acquiring a language, where students have difficulty using or applying the learned language, so that teaching can be conducted in a more efficient way.

It would be ideal that teachers have emotional intelligence so that they could not only facilitate a positive atmosphere in the classroom but also influence students to enhance their own emotional intelligence. Teachers have to handle emotions in a social setting and adjust their own mannerisms and actions accordingly to be as

effective as possible. People have emotional intelligence naturally, but if the teacher has low emotional intelligence, the development of student emotional intelligence would be minimal.

An emotionally intelligent teacher is necessary to have an emotionally intelligent classroom atmosphere. A teacher with low emotional intelligence will not radiate emotional intelligence to the students or influence them to raise their own emotional intelligence. Is it possible for a teacher to give sound advice and to control a classroom with bad behaviour if the teacher has not developed emotional intelligence and cannot control his/her own feelings?

Not only should students be aware of this ability, but so should teachers. The roles of teachers' emotional intelligence in increasing language teaching abilities can be achieved. On the other hand, the role of students' emotional intelligence is that students who have emotional intelligence will learn languages better than students who do not. Learning different languages helps to serve an individual's ability to communicate with others. Due to this, people with higher emotional intelligence levels are seen to be more successful when learning a language.

Taking care of the emotional intelligence of the student is equally important for the teacher. It is important for language teachers to not only be trained in their subject matter but to also be able to read the emotional signs and body language of the students in order to make their learning experience as positive as possible. A teacher should also know how to effectively handle troublesome students using emotional intelligence, while keeping in touch with his/her own mood and temper. To improve the students' behaviour, the teacher should express feelings about the bad behaviour instead of giving orders.

5. Conclusions

Education is a reciprocal relationship and the techniques that are learned will be passed on to students who in turn will pass along the knowledge further. A teacher who does not have much emotional intelligence, such as empathy, cooperation, management of emotions and respect, will not likely enhance the emotional intelligence of the students. How can a teacher expect high quality students without being of high quality him/herself? How can the teacher expect respect and motivation without being motivated or respectful him/herself?

The development and implementation of emotional intelligence in teachers should be promoted so students can learn better. Emotional skill management should be emphasised more in the curriculums; components such as self-management, problem solving, reciprocal learning, and a need to focus on goals should also be added. Students can make remarkable progress if their teachers can understand and relate to students who may be shy, violent, lazy, or negative, especially if teachers are able to empathise with them and consider that there may be a root cause for these behaviours. Through emotional intelligence in the student and the teacher, learning can be achieved at a greater scale.

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