
Towards Cultivating Emotional Intelligence in an ELT Classroom: Strategies & Outcomes

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Abstract: *In the well reputed journal of Applied Psychology by Hunter, J. E. And others (1990:75) it has been stated that “in every field, your EQ is twice as important as your cognitive abilities. This is not only true in service-oriented professions such as sales and psychology, but also in technical professions such as engineering and computer programming.” (cited in Mangal, S.K. and Shubhra, Mangal, 2015, p. 53). These days students are under tremendous pressure, be it academic, family, peer or societal. Today, failure in exam seems to be equated with failure in life by some, resulting in increasing numbers of suicides. A student who fails in an important exam feels vulnerable and depressed. In this scenario, teachers can play an effective role by helping withdrawn and despondent students to be emotionally balanced and resilient by teaching them a variety of coping skills, providing diverse carefully selected inspirational, motivational materials. Since words have immense power to heal, comfort, console, convince and transform, an English language teacher can use the English language teaching (ELT) class to bring a holistic development in the personalities of young learners so that they become adept in regulating their emotions and impulses.*

Key Words: *Emotional intelligence, Emotional health, Language learning, Coping with stress*

“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care” states Theodore Roosevelt while Dale Carnegie observes that when dealing with people we should remember that we are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion.

Today importance is given to being smart, with a high IQ, however, as Daniel Goleman points out, if one is not able to manage his or her distressing emotions, if one cannot have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart a person is, he or she is not going to get very far (cited in Dozier, 2009, p.130). While IQ is undoubtedly important, it cannot be disputed that emotional intelligence enhances empathy and self-awareness which result in better social skills. IQ alone is not sufficient to ensure meaningful personal and professional success unless it is coupled with EQ. In our day to day dealings with people we come across several circumstances where indifference to others' predicament, rudeness, emotional outbursts etc. has a long-lasting detrimental effect on interpersonal relationships. At times people are unaware of the harm they cause when they yell at, hurt and blame others for a situation and are unaware that the problem lies within themselves. Perhaps their family and friends bear with them but in the professional sphere such behaviour would be unacceptable.

In the professional arena one is expected to be courteous, polite, respect other's opinions, agree to disagree, be empathetic and sensitive towards peers and subordinates alike. The attitude and the manner in which one perceives and interacts with others, defines one's own character. This looks very obvious but when we look around and see people losing their temper or having a superior, condescending attitude towards others, we realize the importance of having control over one's emotions. Abigail Van Buren rightly said that

the best index to a person's character is how he treats people who can't do him any good, and how he treats people who can't fight back.

Life is not a bed of roses; it has its own way of testing people. When situations are beyond one's control, people sometimes shout, cry or behave without restraint instead of staying calm and composed. At work one is expected to behave in a balanced manner. A person who is not emotionally stable or fails to manage his or her emotions, is considered to be found wanting in professional attributes.

In life one faces ups and downs. One cannot always be successful; defeat and pain are a recurring theme and refrain of life; but one cannot keep on brooding over what is lost. Many famous people around the world had experienced epic failures on their way to success. Some examples are: Thomas Edison who was told by his teachers he was 'too stupid to learn anything' went on to become a prolific inventor with more than 1,000 patents, including the phonograph and electric lamp. Another interesting example can be Albert Einstein, the physicist, who was a slow learner as a child but eventually won the Nobel Prize for services to theoretical physics and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect. Walt Disney, pioneer of the American animation industry, was sacked by his newspaper editor who told him he 'lacked imagination and had no good ideas' but later he was the one to revolutionize the animation industry. Abraham Lincoln's numerous failures included multiple failed attempts in business and later several failed runs at political office before he finally succeeded to become the President of the United States. Stephen King, the renowned American author had his first book **Carrie** rejected 30 times, but later penned numerous horror, supernatural, suspense and science fiction and has several best sellers to his credit.

For better productivity in work, one must learn how to synthesize and unite the functioning of one's brain and heart. Success can be ensured in any professional field when a person is equipped "with a sufficient amount of EQ accompanied with a reasonable amount of IQ and not vice versa." (cited in Mangal and Mangal, 2015, p. 54)

American author, philanthropist and life coach, Anthony Robbins, believes that emotions are the driving force behind all human action; they make and mar relationships, they drive, excite, entice, challenge, and inspire us and therefore it is important to master our emotions.

Bradberry and Greaves (2005) write: "People who develop their EI tend to be successful on their job because they two go hand in hand. These findings hold true for all people and in all industries, at all levels, in every region of the world. We have not yet been able to find a job in which performance is not tied to emotional intelligence."

Academic institutions ensure that students master basic skills – Reading, Writing and Arithmetic and have strong backgrounds in their respective subjects, but less emphasis is given to nurturing their emotional skills. Holistic education cannot be straitjacketed by textbooks and syllabi; it has to have a broader agenda such as imparting life skills, values and emotional competencies.

The four basic emotion-related abilities are (1) Perception/expression of emotion, (2) Use of emotion to facilitate thinking, (3) Understanding of emotion, and (4) Management of emotion in oneself and others. These four skills which are inter-related, once acquired not only impact academics and professional life but can also ensure positive relationships and boost emotional health. The skill of perceiving emotion, refers not only to the ability to be alert and sensitive to one's own emotions and those of others but also recognizing it in arts, stories and music.

The second skill i.e. using emotion to facilitate thinking refers to the ability to generate emotions to communicate feelings, or engage in various cognitive processes like solving problems, reasoning, problem solving, and making decisions. Understanding of emotion, the third skill, refers to the ability not only to understand one's emotions but also their causes. Management of emotion, the fourth skill, refers to the ability to use effective techniques to encourage personal development and growth.

However, to create awareness about emotional competencies among learners, teachers have to make the required effort to become emotionally intelligent themselves. In the course of teaching and interacting with students, a teacher experiences a gamut of positive and negative emotions. A teacher, who lacks positivity and is unable to regulate emotions, may humiliate undisciplined or slow learners in front of the whole class, and thus unknowingly become instrumental in triggering negative emotions in students such as feelings of sadness, guilt or shame. This is counterproductive. When both teacher and student possess emotional intelligence (EI), it creates a congenial environment and paves the way to effective communication, better stress and conflict management.

According to Mayer and Salovey, EI pertains to an individual's capacity to reason about emotions and to process emotional information to enhance cognitive processes and regulate behavior. (cited in Ciarrochi and Mayer, 2007,p.2) How one is able to cope with stress and remain optimistic in facing adversity, reflects his/her emotional wellbeing. EI skills greatly influence learners' academic, personal, and social lives. Often teachers find intelligent students who cannot perform well just because they are over anxious. If learners are helped to monitor and regulate emotions, they can stay more focused in class and manage stressful situations like speaking in front of a class or writing tests. The outcome of emotional competence often results in better academic performance. Such students become assertive communicators and behave in a more responsible, socially appropriate manner. If one is not able to judge others' verbal and nonverbal emotional cues, one tends to behave in an insensitive, hostile or even aggressive manner. Learners who develop positive social relationships feel more comfortable in their academic environment and consequently receive better love, support and care from teachers and peers.

A teacher's role is not restricted by the confines of a set syllabus. A dynamic teacher not only ensures that the students perform well in exams but also leaves no stone unturned to shape their character and personality traits. A teacher can use a variety of innovative strategies, tools, and techniques, in order to increase learners' awareness of the importance of EI. Teachers can point to the fact that employing EI skills are beneficial not only for better academic learning outcomes but also for stress management, decision making, building interpersonal relationships, and the overall quality of one's life.

Some of the strategies are discussed below.

Teaching words that express feelings: Success in the professional and personal sphere not only demands a right understanding of one's emotions but also the ability to communicate them in the most appropriate manner. To be emotionally literate, one not only needs a complete understanding of oneself and others, but also should know what triggers such emotional crisis and be able to articulate them by carefully choosing the most proper, suitable words. Emotional literacy enables students to be socially more competent, helps them to empathize with others and leads to healthy interpersonal communication. The English teacher can list words that express emotions and feelings such as brave, cheerful, relieved, overwhelmed, friendly, generous, shy, worried, lonely, confused, bored etc. and teach these vocabulary items in class. To understand people and to express their characters, students can be taught character-trait-words like amiable, articulate, charismatic, benevolent, accessible, cheerful, compassionate, empathetic, enthusiastic, dynamic, ebullient, incorruptible, invulnerable, etc.

At times we tend to complicate or even worsen a situation by using inappropriate words. For example, the morale of a student is affected when a teacher chides him/her for not submitting his/her assignment in time by using rude expressions such as "You're irresponsible or you'll never succeed in life because you never take things seriously or complete them in time." The same situation if handled carefully and sensitively will be different. If the teacher uses positive expressions like "If you had completed this assignment in time, don't you think, you could have had more time to study for exams without any stress?"

Writing exercise: In order to teach students how to manage their emotions they can be provided with a case study, and asked to draw their own inferences regarding the emotions (their range and intensity) of the characters in the case study and how they could be dealt with in the best possible manner. Since emotions play a vital role in human interaction, to complete this task successfully they have to ensure that they are using the suitable vocabulary to capture the emotions of the character and the situations. This task requires learners to go beyond the memory based learning and be creative problem solvers.

Group Discussion: An English teacher can facilitate discussions through well chosen topics. For example, a topic like “Is it possible for Robots to effectively replace humans as teachers?” has been used by the authors in the English interactive lab. To deal with such a topic, students need to critically analyze it and come up with meaningful conclusions. This topic calls attention to the fact that teachers go beyond text books to shape the character and future of their students. When it comes to character building, EI plays a vital role and the teacher has to observe whether the students were able to highlight this particular aspect (i.e. how robots can only complement but not completely replace teachers), in their discussion.

Role play/dialogue writing: The advantage of using Role plays is that it involves active participation of the students when they are required to put themselves in the shoes of the characters, which teaches them to be more observant of people and events around them, to ask questions, attempt to understand and differentiate between good and bad, and assimilate all that is good into their character. With the objective of making students more emotionally competent, the authors used themes such as ‘the importance of cleanliness’, ‘the evils of dowry system and corruption’ etc. in the course of the interactive Lab sessions.

JAM/Extempore speeches: Students can be asked to speak for a minute in front of the class on ‘an emotional crisis that they have gone through and how they coped with it’. In doing so they enlighten others about how a situation like this can be tackled. After this activity any other student can also be asked to share his/her views on how the situation could be dealt with in a different or in a better way.

Students can be even encouraged to deliver impromptu speeches on ‘coping with disasters’ such as the recent destructive hurricanes like Harvey and Irma in the USA and the devastating earthquake in Mexico. Such topics would help learners to think and empathize with people from different societies and share their opinions on how people might have dealt with the emotional turbulence caused by such natural disasters.

Picture perception: In this activity, students are required to observe a picture for 30 seconds, then write a story in 4 minutes and present it to their classmates in 2 minutes. Teachers can carefully choose a picture for example, a person crying and looking at his house demolished by an earthquake. Students are then asked to come up with a creative story where they suggest ways to cope with the emotional turbulence and to tackle the situation. Such exercises help learners to perceive non-verbal cues correctly and act accordingly.

PPT: Students can be asked to make power point presentations on a theme like “Life is a roller coaster ride” taking examples from prominent personalities highlighting the importance of resilience and rebounding from loss and failure. For instance, the stoical manner in which Thomas Edison reacted to his factory burning down or how calmly Newton reacted to his dog, Diamond that caused a fire burning down years of research work, shows their emotional balance and ‘grace under pressure’.

Reading materials: Learners can be provided materials which can include short stories, articles, and poems (such as **Where the Mind Is without Fear** by Rabindranath Tagore). The authors have been using articles from Readers’ Digest, Competition Success Review Magazine and Newspapers such as The Hindu (Usha Raman “Watch Out for Each Other,” 21st August 2017) and also OU prescribed essays such as APJ Abdul Kalam, Sachin Tendulkar, Azim Premji etc. as sources to teach life lessons which lead to emotional maturity.

Audio visual aids: In interactive labs teachers can use audio visual aids can serve as powerful means of imparting EQ by using interesting, motivational audio visual materials. In the interactive labs, the authors have used the following videos: **Winning: It’s all in your head** by Dennis Waitely and **How Full Is Your Bucket** by Tom Rath.

Quotes: To meet the objective of enhancing learners' emotional competence, a teacher can select a few relevant quotes which can deeply affect, inspire and motivate. Here are a few examples of the quotes used by the authors in their classes as well as on the Notice Board for the Thought of the Day.

-) Anyone can be angry--that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way--that is not easy. Aristotle
-) Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame. Benjamin Franklin
-) You can conquer almost any fear if you will only make up your mind to do so. For remember, fear doesn't exist anywhere except in the mind. Dale Carnegie
-) Never react emotionally to criticism. Analyze yourself to determine whether it is justified. If it is, correct yourself. Otherwise, go on about your business. Norman Vincent Peale
-) When you listen with empathy to another person, you give that person psychological air. Stephen R. Covey
-) Tenderness and kindness are not signs of weakness and despair, but manifestations of strength and resolution. Kahlil Gibran
-) One way to boost our willpower and focus is to manage our distractions instead of letting them manage us. -Daniel Goleman

Songs and lyrics: Another effective tool to make students emotionally aware is to introduce them to the lyrics of carefully chosen songs which impart valuable life lessons besides lifting their spirits, for example, the lyrics of the song '**Try everything**' by Shakira in the movie Zootopia, the refrain of which, emphasizes not giving up till one reaches the end. The song reminds one not to push oneself so hard since at times we might come last but the fact is that we had done our best.

Another example could be the inspiring lyrics from the song '**A hero lies in you**' by Mariah Carey. It reassures us that the journey of life seems like "a long road" when one faces it alone but when it looks hopeless, one should shun fear, look within, introspect and realize that a hero lies within oneself.

Understanding nonverbal cues: Nonverbal communication plays a large part in emotional intelligence. One can understand the feelings of others by observing and being sensitive to their nonverbal communication cues. Learners can be guided to learn to observe the people they care for, read their faces, and listen to what they are not saying. Someone may be depressed or anxious. To connect and help them, one has to be alert to others' nonverbal cues (facial expressions, gestures, postures etc). Emotional self-awareness may help one to predict emotions in various situations and thus make one alert to his/her behavior. One has to learn and evaluate not only his or her but also others' emotions and respond appropriately.

Self-analysis Questionnaire: Students can also be provided with a list of questions like:

- ✓ How often do you fail to control your anger?
- ✓ Can you easily forgive others the way you forgive yourself?
- ✓ Are you fickle minded and often change your decisions?
- ✓ Do you often argue with people?
- ✓ Are you a fault finder?
- ✓ Do you tend to blame others for your mistakes?
- ✓ Do you lie to avoid adverse consequences?

Students are required, not only to say a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but also suggest ways of self correction. Such a task will make them aware of how to cope with emotionally charged situations that they might encounter in future.

Learners are to be helped to hone emotional competence as it immensely affects one’s thought and behavior. One would be highly productive if one is aware of the emotions that are appropriate for different situations. For example, a learner, when he/she is in a good mood would feel highly energetic and motivated to accomplish the given tasks. However, the same student who has to attend an extra class at the end of the day when he/she is tired will not show interest and a negative state will make the task seem more difficult. In such a situation teachers can employ strategies like the ones mentioned above to achieve the desired, positive outcomes. Once the teacher observes a positive change in the student, he/she must be appreciated or rewarded so that it provides further motivation to the learner to nurture the zeal to show more maturity in combating emotional crisis.

Learners need to be made aware that all of us experience stressors in our lives. When we are emotionally surcharged we are not rational, our reasoning becomes clouded and we may tend to make biased decisions. In order that we maintain our mental health and are not overwhelmed by them we need to use coping strategies like practicing deep breathing to help reduce stress and induce relaxation; setting aside time everyday to relax, taking time for reading or any physical or creative activities like music and journaling; making time for family, friends and for spirituality, giving and accepting support, taking care to eat nutritious food and getting enough rest. We also need to consciously stay away from harmful coping mechanisms such as using drugs, excessive alcohol, denial and overwork.

T. Bradberry and G Jean (2005) pointed that “...a good amount of EQ coupled with necessary EI skills is helpful to us in excelling in our world of work and enjoying success.” People with EI related competencies are conscious of their emotional state, their strengths and limitations of their emotional energy and thus are capable of employing it for managing situations better. It can be particularly beneficial if people who are endowed with EQ make the effort to get equipped with effective communication skills since it can help them to be good leaders. Such people can provide the needed motivation, enthusiasm and zeal that is required for pursuing one’s goal. These people know how to deal with adverse conditions and meet various challenges like coping with difficult people for e.g. bullies, non-cooperative and aggressive people.

One cannot be professionally contented if one feels stressed and have poor emotional management. It impacts not only the daily work schedule but also hinders one's goal achievement. The outcome of incorporating emotional intelligence in the course of teaching English can be very satisfactory. Once students acquire these skills, they do not feel threatened to express themselves; rather, they develop positive ‘pro-social’ behavior and feel comfortable in sharing their emotions. Learners need to take care of their emotional health since it boosts their self-esteem. They can achieve this by introspecting and confronting the issues that are troubling them so that they can experience the joy of being at peace with themselves. In the words of William James, “Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.” After all life is a journey and one should strive to evolve mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

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