

Article

# The place of emotions in language education from an emotional intelligence perspective

İbrahim Halil Topal

Gazi University, 06830 Yenimahalle, Turkey; [ibrahimtopal@gazi.edu.tr](mailto:ibrahimtopal@gazi.edu.tr)

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**Abstract:** The significance of emotions in language education is increasingly acknowledged as a crucial element that impacts both teaching and learning. This article delves into the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing the language learning experience, emphasizing the importance of perceiving, using, understanding, and regulating emotions. Educators, as integral to the learning process, can cultivate more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environments by integrating emotional awareness and regulation strategies into language teaching. This holistic approach to language education intertwines cognitive and emotional development, emphasizing the practical implications for educators in fostering EI in the language classroom to improve learner engagement and success.

**Keywords:** emotions; emotional intelligence; language learning; language teaching; psychology

## 1. Introduction

Emotions are crucial for intricate human experiences, connecting our experiences, behaviors, and interpersonal connections [1]. Emotions are a natural part of life, ranging from joys to sorrows, coloring the canvas of our world in shades ranging from light to dark. They are the lenses through which people view the world and how it views them. Emotional intelligence (EI) comes into prominence in this chaotic environment, acting as a compass that guides students through the ups and downs of life's emotional waters. EI is a broad term that includes the capacity to identify, comprehend, regulate, and leverage one's emotions and those of others [2]. This broad concept has been widely discussed and adopted in different fields, but its importance in emotional regulation for students is particularly profound [3].

Emotional management, which is highly significant, is included within EI. Since students are navigating a world of academic rigors, social interaction, and personal development, EI might be a powerful tool that helps them learn how to manage, control, and harness their emotions in the classroom [4]. Put differently, emotionally intelligent learners are distinguished by their ability to navigate emotions, harness emotional energy, and direct it toward positive outcomes [5]. Given the potential academic gains that might be reaped from EI [6], any attempts at its teaching can be considered worthwhile. To this end, this article tackles the EI, presents its underlying theoretical foundation, discusses the emotional factors in language learning, outlines the EI skills in language education, and proposes strategies to integrate EI in language teaching.

## 2. Theoretical foundations

### 2.1. Emotional intelligence: A concise description

EI was initially proposed by Salovey and Mayer [7] and later popularized by Goleman [8] and other scholars. Salovey and Mayer [7] defined EI 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 thinking and actions” (p. 189). Their initial framework comprised appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion, and utilization of emotion. Mayer and Salovey [9] revised their framework. They introduced the four-branch model to EI, also known as the PUUM model: perceiving emotion, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding, and managing emotions. Mayer et al. [10] later presented seven principles of EI:

- (1) Emotional intelligence is a mental ability (p. 290);
- (2) Emotional intelligence is best measured as an ability (p. 291);
- (3) Intelligent problem solving does not correspond neatly to intelligent behavior (p. 291);
- (4) A test’s content—the problem-solving area involved—must be clearly specified as a precondition for the measurement of human mental abilities (p. 291);
- (5) Valid tests have well-defined subject matter that draws out relevant human mental abilities (p. 292);
- (6) Emotional intelligence is a broad intelligence (p. 292);
- (7) Emotional intelligence is a member of the class of broad intelligences focused on hot information processing (p. 292);

There have been some changes to the four-branch model by Mayer et al. [10]. The first update was the inclusion of more problem-solving instances. The second update was the determination of mental abilities involved in EI. Third, EI was defined as a broad, dynamic intelligence that draws comparisons to personal and social intelligence. Fourth, EI might be classified among other emergent intelligences. The fifth update was that EI utilizes particular kinds of problem-solving techniques. With these revisions, the updated framework now includes four constructs: perceiving emotion, facilitating thought using emotion, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

Perceiving emotion encompasses identifying, perceiving, expressing, understanding, and discriminating emotions in oneself and others [10]. Facilitating thought using emotion includes generating emotions, prioritizing thoughts, leveraging mood swings, and selecting problems based on emotional states [10]. The third construct involves labeling emotions, recognizing cultural differences, affective forecasting, recognizing mood changes, understanding complex emotions, differentiating between moods and emotions, and determining the causes and effects of emotions [10]. The final construct, on the other hand, contains effective emotional management, monitoring emotional reactions, engaging with emotions, evaluating strategies for emotional responses, and staying open to opposite emotions [10].

Previous studies on EI in educational contexts revealed promising results. For instance, Oz et al. [11] concluded in their research that understanding students’ EI and its influence on their attitudes toward L2 would lead to deeper insights into the quality of language learning and educational outcomes. Also, EI appears to be closely linked to conflict resolution strategies, while a correlation is observed between EI levels and the amount of time spent engaging in workplace disputes [12]. In addition, Mamat and

Ismail [13] demonstrated that EI skills directly impacted teaching and learning processes. Khassawneh et al. [14] found that EI impacted educators' behaviors, which, in turn, influenced student achievement.

Similarly, Trad et al. [15] revealed that EI-related concepts, such as "self-awareness, self-management, self-motivation, and social skills," positively affected teacher performance (p. 556). A recent study showed that grit and EI significantly impacted the research anxiety experienced by tertiary education students, independently and in combination [16]. In their study, Lee and Kutty [17] found a strong correlation between EI and teacher professional identity, indicating the potential influence of EI in developing the professional identity of teacher trainees. In sum, individuals who can perceive their emotions and those of others, facilitate their intellectual activities through emotions, and understand and manage emotions have a higher level of EI.

Despite the relatively abundant research on EI, significant research gaps still need to be bridged. For instance, the interventions that can enhance EI in educational settings must still be discovered. Also, the extent to which EI varies among different education and proficiency levels has yet to be discovered. Additionally, the long-term impacts of higher EI on students and teachers beyond educational contexts need exploring. Moreover, there needs to be more mention of how students perceive the role of EI in their learning process. Furthermore, the potential pitfalls of EI on students, such as emotional burnout and excessive conflict avoidance, should be researched more. The influence of culture and technology on EI in education is further understudied. Accordingly, this study is a reference for integrating EI in language education contexts.

## **2.2. Affective filter hypothesis**

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (AFH) [18] suggests that learners' emotional states, attitudes, motivations, and anxiety levels can act as a filter that either facilitates or impedes language acquisition [19]. Emotional variables can have a significant influence on learning a language [20]. For instance, anxiety can make it difficult for learners to concentrate on the input, affecting their comprehension and language production abilities. Language instructors can play a crucial role in creating a supportive and positive learning environment [21], addressing learners' anxieties, and promoting positive attitudes towards the target language and culture, which can enhance learners' language learning outcomes.

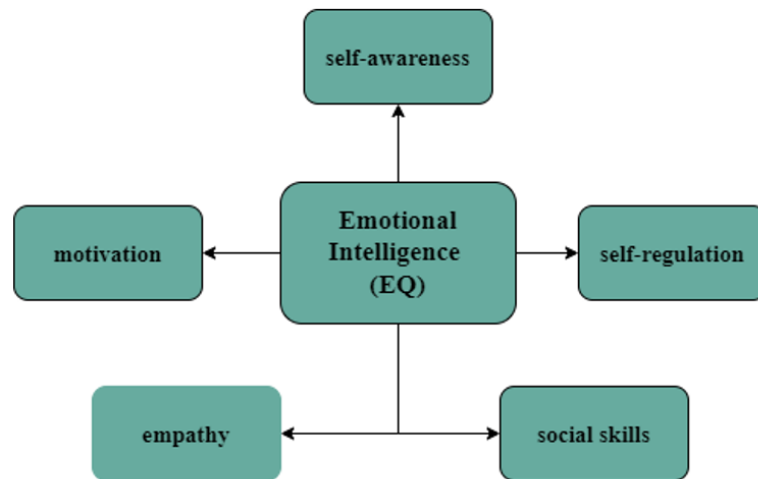
## **2.3. Social constructivism**

Lev Vygotsky's [22] social constructivism theory emphasizes the salience of social interaction, cultural influence, and emotions in cognitive development and learning. Learning is a collaborative activity that occurs through social engagements, and emotions play a critical role in mediating the interplay between social interaction and learning [23]. Positive social interactions and emotional experiences can positively impact learning, while negative ones can hinder it [24]. The Zone of Proximal Development [22] is a significant concept that highlights "the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem

solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” [22]. Educators and learners need to understand and acknowledge the role of emotions in learning and create supportive and positive learning environments that promote collaborative interaction and emotional well-being.

### 3. EI skills in language education

EI is an essential aspect of language education that can contribute to learners’ well-being, motivation, and success [25]. Integrating EI skills into language education can enhance learners’ ability to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and interact harmoniously with others [26]. Five critical EI skills (**Figure 1**) should be considered in language education: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, social skills, and motivation [27].



**Figure 1.** The EI skills.

Self-awareness: “the capacity of becoming the object of one’s own attention” [28]. Eurich [29] proposes two types of self-awareness. Internal self-awareness involves awareness of our values, passions, strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and impact on others, and how we fit into our environment. External self-awareness is about understanding how others perceive us in terms of the same factors mentioned above.

Vohs and Baumeister [30] describe self-regulation as “the exercise of control over oneself, especially with regard to bringing the self into line with preferred (thus, regular) standards” (p. 2). Effective language learning requires the development of self-regulation and emotional intelligence [31]. Self-regulation involves setting goals, time management, and perseverance [32], while emotional intelligence assists in comprehending and managing emotions during language learning [31]. These two skills impact the selection and efficacy of language learning strategies, allowing learners to handle social situations, overcome challenges, and adjust to various learning environments [33,34].

Motivation is the inner drive that propels a person's actions, thoughts, and behaviors toward accomplishing specific objectives or fulfilling particular needs, thus providing energy and direction to achieve desired outcomes [35]. Motivation, emotional intelligence, and language learning are interrelated elements of personal growth and progress. When individuals utilize their motivation to develop their emotional intelligence and incorporate these abilities into their language learning process, they can enrich their proficiency and aptitude in a new language and attain valuable insights into themselves and others [36].

Empathy is commonly defined as the ability to imagine oneself in someone else's situation or to understand and share one's emotions and perspective, which involves comprehending and relating to another person's mental or emotional state [37]. Empathy has often been associated with EI and language learning and communication [34,38,39]. The combination of empathy and emotional intelligence fosters an environment that supports language learners in developing their language skills and cultivating a deep understanding and respect for different cultures and experiences [36,38].

Social skills, EI, and language learning are closely related to human communication. Good social skills require high emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-control, empathy, and interpersonal skills, all essential for effective communication and building relationships [40]. In contrast, learning a new language involves acquiring language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and empathy for speakers of different languages [41]. Developing these skills together may enhance one's capacity to engage with others, appreciate different perspectives, and establish meaningful connections across cultures and languages.

Developing these skills may facilitate language learning, promote emotional well-being, and enhance learners' ability to communicate effectively in the target language [36,42,43]. Educators should therefore integrate EI-focused activities, discussions, and reflective practices into their language-teaching strategies to help learners develop these skills and succeed in their language-learning journey.

#### **4. Integrating EI in language education**

Language education can be improved by integrating EI into teaching practices, learning environments, and curricula [44,45]. This can be achieved by promoting emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and motivation among students [46]. Some strategies (**Table 1**) may be adopted to integrate EI into language education [36,47,48]. For instance, teachers might create an environment where students feel safe to express their thoughts, concerns, and emotions without fear of judgment and model empathy by actively listening and validating student experiences.

Given that many language learners fear speaking in the target language and develop language anxiety [49], teachers can act as emotionally aware individuals in language classrooms. In practical terms, teachers can establish ground rules specific to EI for classroom language. Previous research indicated that classroom environment influenced foreign language anxiety [50]. Therefore, a positive and supportive classroom environment might lower students' affective filter and foster academic outcomes.

**Table 1.** Strategies for incorporating EI into language education.

Strategies
creating a supportive and empathetic learning environment
using emotionally engaging content
promoting social and collaborative learning
conducting regular emotional check-ins with students
introducing relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices
developing intercultural competence and sensitivity among language learners

Language learners often experience frustration, embarrassment, or anxiety in language learning [51]. Therefore, teachers can help them identify such emotions. Learners can improve their emotional awareness through reflective practices and strategies to handle them effectively. Practically, teachers can introduce reflective practice through which learners can contemplate their emotional states during specific language tasks (e.g., complex speaking activities) and how they handle such emotional management issues. Previous research indicated that emotionally intelligent and aware students performed well in language classrooms [52]. To this end, emotional awareness-raising activities might yield promising results.

The content of language courses can also be adapted for EI integration into language education. For instance, teachers can incorporate emotionally resonant and relatable resources for meaningful and memorable learning when choosing teaching materials. More precisely, teaching resources such as movies, stories, and articles that prompt sundry emotions among students might spark discussions about different EI components. Short animated movies (e.g., *Piper*), short stories (e.g., *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*), and podcasts about mindfulness or wellbeing (e.g., *Ten Percent Happier with Dan Harris*) might be useful for raising emotional awareness among language students. Previous studies showed that creating emotionally engaging content contributed to positive learning outcomes and meaningful learning experiences [53,54].

Another way teachers can integrate EI in language classrooms is to create social and collaborative learning through group projects, discussion circles, and pair work. Working with other students in such collaborative tasks might help learners empathize with others [55,56]. Teachers can design speaking and writing activities that require student collaboration (e.g., creative writing, digital storytelling projects, and group presentations) and ask them to collaborate during the preparation, presentation, and reflection stages. Learners are already expected to work together on the designated tasks. However, they can further be asked to reflect on each other's performance by sharing feedback on not only their academic performance but also their emotional fluctuations throughout the process. Social-emotional learning was shown to yield positive contributions to students in previous scholarly work [57,58].

Additionally, consistent check-ins enable teachers to assess the emotional atmosphere in the classroom and recognize any challenges that students might be experiencing, which could affect their motivation and performance in language learning [59]. Teachers can start or end class sessions with quick emotional evaluations, asking students about their emotions about the subject matter, the material,

or any problems they might encounter. These evaluations can occur through speaking, writing in a journal, or using a simple “emotional meter” chart. In the virtual learning environment, teachers can use polls or communication boxes to let students privately share their emotions. This way, teachers can emphasize that students’ emotions are also important and that they are cared for, resulting in a better emotional classroom climate [60].

Introducing relaxation techniques and mindfulness practices is another way to incorporate EI into language classrooms. Brief relaxation or mindfulness exercises might help reduce language anxiety [61]. Such exercises also improved short-term vocabulary retention [62]. It was further indicated that mindfulness fostered academic achievement and awareness [63]. Some practical implementations in language classrooms include breathing exercises or brief meditation, particularly before high-stakes activities (e.g., oral presentations and group discussions). Previous studies indicated the effectiveness of such activities in lowering learners’ anxiety [61–63].

Lastly, teachers can contribute to students’ EI development by including activities that help develop intercultural competence and sensitivity. Authentic materials (e.g., movies, short stories, and news articles) might be exploited, especially in multilingual classrooms, to raise awareness and help develop empathy and respect for students from different cultural backgrounds. For example, Hutchins and Goldstein Hode [64] reported positive staff perceptions toward cultural differences after introducing a diversity course. Lash et al. [65] emphasized cultivating interculturally competent teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. Concerning the significance of emotionally intelligent students, raising interculturally aware and competent students might be considerably helpful for those who wish to work abroad or in multinational companies.

Overall, these strategies can be implemented naturally rather than forcefully in language classrooms. Put differently, they could be a natural part of every language classroom. For instance, teachers might start each lesson with quick emotional check-ins, conduct brief relaxation or mindfulness activities before stressful tasks, and integrate emotionally relatable content in their lesson plans (e.g., movies, podcasts, or news articles) and hence contribute to the formation of emotionally supportive language learning environments.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article surmounted EI’s position in language education. Integrating EI into language learning can enhance learners’ experiences and outcomes. EI-focused strategies create a supportive, empathetic, and enriching learning environment, from fostering self-awareness and self-regulation to promoting empathy, social skills, and cultural sensitivity. By addressing the emotional aspects of language learning and teaching, educators can help learners develop the emotional resilience, interpersonal skills, and cultural awareness necessary for effective communication in the target language. Future research could explore the long-term effects of EI-focused language teaching practices on learners’ language proficiency, motivation, and well-being. Developing reliable and valid assessment tools to measure learners’ EI skills in the context of language education could help educators identify students’ strengths and

areas for improvement. Additionally, offering professional development opportunities for language educators to enhance their EI skills and teaching practices could contribute to creating more emotionally intelligent learning environments. Finally, exploring the potential of technology, such as virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI), and digital platforms, to support EI-focused language learning could open up new avenues for personalized, interactive, and engaging learning experiences.

Despite the present study's contribution to the relevant literature, it recognizes some limitations. First, the current study tackled EI's place in language education and offered some strategies for its implementation. It, therefore, lacks experimental evidence to generalize the findings. For that reason, future researchers might concentrate on experimental studies with students and teachers for generalizable outcomes. Second, as mentioned in the background section, there are significant research gaps concerning EI in language education. More specifically, prospective researchers might conduct longitudinal studies on EI development among students, context-specific EI interventions, explore students' perceptions of EI in their learning process, investigate the potential downsides of EI integration, explore the impact of culture and technology on EI in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, focus on learners with different proficiency levels in different education contexts, examine the relationship between EI and various academic subjects, and study gender differences in EI and educational impact.

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