

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ADDRESSING SENSITIVE ISSUES

Febri Dhany Triwibowo¹⁾, Januarius Mujiyanto²⁾, Puji Astuti³⁾, Yuliati⁴⁾

Universitas Negeri Semarang

Semarang, Indonesia

febridhany@students.unnes.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between student's emotional intelligence (EI) and their comfort in discussing sensitive topics within English classrooms and examines how EI influences students' attitudes towards it. Conducted with 39 English major students at Dian Nuswantoro University, the research aims to determine students' EI quality. The data was collected through a questionnaire and quantitative methods to analyze the data. The questionnaire delves into students' EI regarding self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. The findings were compared to previous research on students' interest and comfort levels in discussing culturally sensitive topics. Results indicate that higher emotional intelligence correlates with students' comfort level in discussing sensitive issues. Highlighting the importance of EI in fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. This study underscores the potential of EI development in enhancing student engagement and creating a positive atmosphere for addressing sensitive topics in educational settings.

Keywords – Emotional intelligence, English classroom, Sensitive issues

Introduction

It is undoubtedly that Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in both personal and professional success, gaining significant attention in psychology and organizational behavior studies. Emotional intelligence is about understanding and managing our own emotions and recognizing and influencing the feelings of others (Goleman, 2020). Originally studied by (D. R. C. J. D. Mayer & Salovey, 2001), EI is often broken down into five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. By examining these components through first principles thinking, we can gain a deeper understanding and practical approach to EI.

Self-awareness is the catalyst of emotional intelligence. It involves recognizing and understanding our own

emotions, drives, and their effects on others. It means being able to identify our emotions as they happen and understanding why we feel a certain way (Mayer & Salovey, 2007). Enhancing self-awareness can be achieved through regular reflection, seeking feedback from others, and practicing mindfulness (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Self-regulation is another critical aspect of controlling or redirecting disruptive emotions and impulses. This includes using mindfulness, stress management techniques, and pausing before reacting to maintain control (Gross, 2002).

In the context of Emotional Intelligence (EI), motivation is the inclination to actively pursue goals with vigor and determination. The process includes establishing explicit and attainable objectives, identifying internal incentives,

and commemorating minor accomplishments to maintain the drive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Empathy, the capacity to comprehend the emotional composition of others, is crucial for establishing robust connections. To improve empathy, we might engage in active listening, empathize by imagining ourselves in others' situations, and be attentive to non-verbal signals (Davis, 1983). Social skills encompass the ability to handle relationships and establish connections, necessitating proficient communication, active social participation, and conflict resolution strategies (Bar-On, 2006).

To optimize the development and improvement of our emotional intelligence, it is crucial to deconstruct it into its core elements and have a profound understanding of each component. This method is consistent with constructivist philosophy, which prioritizes the construction of knowledge based on fundamental conceptions (Piaget, 2000; Vygotsky, 1986). Consistently engaging in these components over time can result in substantial enhancements in emotional management and interpersonal interactions, hence fostering personal development and professional achievements.

In terms of academic performance, EI does affect the academic performance of students. One of the primary ways EI contributes to AP is through enhanced self-awareness (Guslyakova & Guslyakova, 2020). Students with high EI are better at recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, which allows them to focus on areas that need improvement (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). This self-awareness also aids in setting realistic academic goals and pursuing them diligently. When students understand their emotional responses to various academic challenges, they can take proactive steps to manage their emotions effectively, leading to improved performance (Mancaş, 2012).

Based on research by Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2020), integrating meta-

analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and academic performance (AP) on students. Heterogeneity from the result indicated substantial variability among the studies, suggesting that the relationship between EI and AP can be influenced by several moderating factors such as the type of EI measure, sample characteristics, and contextual variables. In short, by enhancing self-awareness, allowing students to recognize strengths and weaknesses and set realistic goals. Improved self-regulation helps manage stress and maintain focus, while intrinsic motivation drives persistence and engagement in studies. Empathy fosters positive relationships and collaborative learning, and strong social skills enable effective communication and support networks. These EI components create a conducive learning environment that enhances academic success and overall well-being.

The benefits of improving EI on students affect both inside and outside the school context (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2008). Similar to Sánchez's research, the research by Fernández mentions several benefits in improving EI. Interpersonal relationships, psychological well-being, academic performance, and appearance of disruptive behavior. Regarding the effect on academic performance, students with limited emotional skills are more likely to experience stress and emotional difficulties throughout their studies (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2008; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2020). Therefore, teaching EI should become a priority and consideration regarding students' development. Teaching EI skills depends on prioritizing practice, training, and improvement rather than verbal instruction (Thao et al., 2023).

Empathy, the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, is crucial for fostering an inclusive and respectful classroom atmosphere. Davis (1983) asserts

that empathetic individuals are better able to put themselves in others' shoes, appreciating diverse perspectives and experiences. In discussing sensitive topics, empathy allows students to listen actively and respond with compassion, acknowledging the validity of others' emotions and viewpoints. This empathetic approach not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also encourages a more collaborative and supportive dialogue, where students feel valued and understood.

Effective communication and strong social skills, essential components of EI, are vital for engaging in discussions about sensitive issues. (Bar-On, 2006) emphasizes that proficient communicators can articulate their thoughts clearly and listen attentively, facilitating a more constructive exchange of ideas. Socially skilled students are also adept at managing conflicts that may arise during discussions, using negotiation and problem-solving techniques to resolve disagreements amicably. These skills are essential for creating a classroom environment where sensitive topics can be explored openly and respectfully, promoting deeper understanding and learning.

Methodology

This study investigates the correlation between students' emotional intelligence (EI) and their comfort in discussing sensitive topics within English classrooms. Conducted with 39 English major students at Dian Nuswantoro University, the research aims to determine students' EI quality and its impact on their attitudes toward discussing culturally sensitive topics. Data was collected through a questionnaire designed to measure various components of EI, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale to capture the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with statements related to these components.

To ensure the accuracy of the data, the EI test was adapted from the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) based on Boyatzis, Goleman, and Rhee (2000). Adaptation was made to reduce bias by ensuring the anonymity of responses and encouraging honest participation. Quantitative methods were employed to analyze the data, and SPSS software was used for regression correlation analysis.

However, there are limitations to this methodology. The sample size is relatively small, and the self-reported nature of the data may lead to social desirability bias. Furthermore, as the study is conducted within a single university, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other contexts.

Findings

The first quantitative analysis is the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test. This analysis method is vital for the next analysis. It was conducted to determine whether the distribution of the 39 students' emotional intelligence (EI) scores differs significantly from a normal distribution. The test results provide several key statistics, including the sample size (N), the mean and standard deviation of the unstandardized residuals, the most extreme differences between the observed and expected cumulative distribution functions, the K-S test statistic, and the significance level.

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		Unstandardized Residual
N		39
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	0E-7
	Std. Deviation	4.92024379
	Absolute	.093
Most Extreme Differences	Positive	.089
	Negative	-.093
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.581
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.888

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z value is .581, which is a standardized test statistic. This value is compared against critical values from the K-S distribution to determine the significance of the test. The Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value, or the p-value, is .888. This p-value is much higher than the common alpha level of .05, indicating that there is no significant difference between the observed distribution of the data and a normal distribution. Therefore, it suggests that the distribution of the students' EI scores does not significantly differ from a normal distribution. With a p-value of .888, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the data are normally distributed. This indicates that the EI scores of the 39 students are approximately normally distributed, which supports the validity of using parametric statistical methods for further analysis of this data set.

The correlation regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and students' perception of their comfort in discussing sensitive topics. The results are presented in a correlation matrix, which includes Pearson correlation coefficients, significance levels, and sample sizes for each variable.

Correlations

		Emotional Intelligence	Students Perception
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.880**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	39	39
Students Perception	Pearson Correlation	.880**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	39	39

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient between emotional intelligence and students' perception is .880. This value indicates a very

strong positive correlation between the two variables. In other words, higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with a greater comfort level in discussing sensitive topics. The strength of this correlation suggests that as students' emotional intelligence increases, their perception of their ability to engage comfortably in sensitive discussions also improves significantly.

Thus, the correlation regression analysis reveals a significant and strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and students' perception of their comfort in discussing sensitive topics. With a Pearson correlation coefficient of .880 and a p-value of .000, the results indicate that students with higher emotional intelligence are much more likely to feel at ease when engaging in discussions about culturally and emotionally charged subjects. This finding highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where sensitive topics can be explored openly and constructively.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and students' comfort in discussing sensitive topics. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirms that the data distribution is normal, validating the use of parametric statistical methods. The Pearson correlation coefficient of .880, highlights a strong relationship between higher EI levels and greater comfort in engaging with sensitive discussions. These findings align with previous research by Sánchez-Álvarez et al. (2020), which emphasize the importance of EI in educational settings. The strong correlation suggests that students with higher EI are better equipped to handle the emotional

complexities of discussing culturally and emotionally charged issues.

It is essential to acknowledge several limitations in this study that may affect the generalizability and interpretation of the results. First, the sample size of 39 students, while sufficient for this analysis, may limit the broader applicability of the findings. Future research with a larger, more diverse sample may provide deeper insights into the relationship between EI and comfort in discussing sensitive topics. Additionally, the method employed to assess emotional intelligence relied on self-report measures, which could introduce bias due to social desirability or self-perception inaccuracies.

The findings suggest that fostering EI in students could enhance their ability to engage in productive and respectful discussions of sensitive topics. This has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it supports the notion that emotional regulation and awareness can influence academic discussions, particularly in areas involving cultural and emotional complexities. Educators might consider integrating emotional intelligence development into their teaching strategies to promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

For instance, implementing programs or workshops to enhance EI could equip students with the tools to navigate challenging topics more effectively. This could be particularly beneficial in multicultural classrooms where discussions on identity, race, or socio-political issues are prevalent. Educators can encourage deeper engagement with these complex subjects by creating an emotionally intelligent and empathetic classroom atmosphere.

Thus, this research could explore how specific elements of EI, such as emotional regulation or empathy, impact students' comfort levels in discussing sensitive topics. Additionally, longitudinal studies may

provide insights into how EI development over time affects students' academic and social interactions in educational settings.

Conclusion

This study reveals a significant and strong positive correlation between EI and students' comfort in discussing sensitive topics, as evidenced by a Pearson correlation coefficient of .880. The findings suggest that students with higher EI are better equipped to engage in culturally and emotionally charged discussions, fostering a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment. The strength of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how EI can enhance both interpersonal communication and emotional management in academic settings. However, this study is not without limitations. The sample size of 39 students may limit the generalizability of the results, and reliance on self-reported EI scores introduces potential bias. Future research could address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples or employing alternative methods to measure emotional intelligence. Additionally, exploring other factors that influence students' comfort in discussing sensitive topics could provide further insight into improving educational practices. Nonetheless, the current findings underscore the value of incorporating EI development into educational curricula to promote more effective and engaged learning environments.

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