

## 'HAND IN HAND WITH EMOTIONS': A SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM FOR EFL STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

As the Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory suggests, emotional intelligence requires the integration of complex set of social, emotional and academic skills essential for life. Considering this precious source of information, the Staff Development Unit and the Syllabus Team at YADİM (The Center of Foreign Languages at Çukurova University, Turkey) collaborated to implement some ideas of EI Theory into the existing EFL curriculum. There were two main causes of starting this pilot study. Firstly, the results of the informal interviews with YADİM teachers showed that some YADİM students have a tendency to drop out from English classes either mentally, by not responding to the lessons attentively, being unmotivated about studying/learning English or physically (attendance). Secondly, there were the needs emphasized by the different lecturers at different faculties of Çukurova University in response to the needs analysis interviews carried out to reshape the contents of the EFL having been conducted at YADİM. These findings confirmed that some graduates of YADİM experience various difficulties regarding their self confidence, social skills, self awareness, and self motivation when they go to their departments to continue with their freshman courses in English. Therefore, the piloting of the 'Hand in Hand with Emotions' program aimed at introducing the ideas of emotional intelligence to meet students' needs to become more autonomous language learners.

**Key Words:** Emotional Intelligence, SEL, curriculum, autonomous learner, learner motivation, drop out, EFL students

### ÖZET

Duygusal Zeka (EI) teorisine göre, hayat sosyal, duygusal ve akademik becerilerin birlikte kullanımını gerektirmektedir. Bu nedenle özbilinç, motivasyon, kendine çekidüzen verme, empati kurma ve ilişkilerde ustalık gibi öne çıkan beş temel unsuruyla duygusal zeka öğrenme potansiyelini belirleyen önemli bir zeka türüdür. YADİM öğretmenleriyle yapılan görüşmelerde bazı öğrencilerin İngilizce derslerine karşı ilgisizlik (dersi ilgiyle takip edememe, öğrendiklerini tekrar etme ve ödev yapma konusunda isteksizlik, derse devamsızlık) eğilimlerinin olduğu gündeme gelmiştir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin öğrendikleri yabancı dili kullanacakları fakültelerdeki bölüm hocalarıyla yapılan ihtiyaç analiz görüşmelerinde de öğrencilerin daha başarılı olabilmeleri için bazı ekstra becerilere (özgüven, sosyal beceriler, kişisel farkındalık, motivasyon) sahip olmaları gerektiği vurgulanmıştır. Bu gerekçeler doğrultusunda YADİM öğrencilerinin daha otonom dil öğrenmeleri olabilmeleri amacıyla yönelik, onları duygusal zeka ile tanıştıran bir pilot çalışma yapmaya gereksinim duyulmuştur. Bu pilot çalışmada YADİM Hizmetiçi Eğitim Birimi (SDU) ve Program Hazırlama Birimi işbirliği yapmış ve duygusal zeka teorisinin bazı yaklaşımlarını, merkezde uygulanmakta olan İngilizce Hazırlık programına entegre edebilmek için "Duygularla EI Ele" eğitim programı geliştirilmiştir. Öncelikle program öğrencilere tanıtılmış ve çeşitli aktivitelerle sekiz hafta (bir blok) süreyle uygulanmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda elde edilen bulgular, öğrencilerin okul ve iş hayatındaki başarıda duygusal zekanın gerekliliği ile ilgili kişisel farkındalıklarının yükseldiğini göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Duygusal zeka, SEL (Sosyal Duygusal Öğrenme), müfredat, otonom öğrenci, öğrenci motivasyonu, derse devamsızlık, EFL öğrencileri.

### Introduction

Since Plato who said "all learning has an emotional base", scientists, educators and philosophers have worked to prove the importance of feelings. In 1950s, Abraham Maslow wrote about how people could enhance their emotional, spiritual, and mental strengths, which marked the start of the 'Human Potential' movement. In 1970s and 80s Humanism as a school of thought led to the development of many new sciences of

human capacity. Researchers therefore started to search for the definitions of both emotions and intelligence.

In 1990 Salovey and Mayer defined Emotional Quotient (EQ) as a ‘scientifically testable intelligence’ and in their words “Emotional Intelligence is a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p.433). This term has also become known as social and emotional learning (SEL), the learning process by which we can aspire to a higher EQ (NYU Child Study Center, 2007). Therefore, Walberg uses the terms ‘social emotional skills’ and ‘emotional intelligence’ interchangeably. According to him, ‘emotional intelligence’ is the name given to the set of abilities that allows students to work with others, learn effectively and serve essential roles in their families, communities and places of work.” (in Elias, 2003, p. 3). This intelligence is based on emotion and people who have this capacity are less depressed, healthier, more employable and have better relationships (EQ Today). It is also claimed that high levels of emotional intelligence contribute to success in important areas of life including education, work and relationships (Goleman, 1995, Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Specifically, Shelton and Stern (2004) highlight the importance of emotions in the educational settings and state that emotions provide learners with motivation, engagement and problem-solving input (in Pellitteri, 2006).

Daniel Goleman (1995), who drew on the research of Salovey and Mayer as well as other researchers and practitioners for his best selling book ‘Emotional Intelligence’, reviewed the best practice in education. He outlines five emotional competencies that are basic to social and emotional learning;

- a) Self and other awareness: Understanding and identifying feelings; knowing when one’s feelings shift; understanding the difference between thinking, feeling and acting; and understanding that one’s actions have consequences in terms of others’ feelings.
- b) Mood management: Handling and managing difficult feelings; controlling impulses; and handling anger constructively.
- c) Self-motivation: Being able to set goals and persevere towards them with optimism and hope, even in the face of setbacks.
- d) Empathy: Being able to put yourself “in someone else’s shoes” both cognitively and affectively; being able to take someone’s perspective; being able to show that you care.
- e) Management of relationships: Making friends; handling friendships; resolving conflicts; cooperating; collaborative learning and other social skills.

Goleman wrote about two school programs; ‘Self Science’ and ‘Social Development’. From his works we learn that emotional intelligence skills can be developed and accordingly the child gains both short-term and long term advantages related to well being, performance and success in life (in Stern, 2002, p.2).

The research in this field also shows that when emotional intelligence becomes a part of schooling;

- Students are more likely to remember and use what they are taught and thus the academic achievement increases,

- Incidents of problem behaviors decrease,
- The relationships that surround each child are improved. (Elias, 2003)

Therefore, “we need to make sure that teachers are teaching in the very best ways with the very best skills in order to effectively build that protective environment for kids. That protective environment can prevent the ‘self destructive behaviors’ that lead to delinquency, drug use and dropping out” (Haggerty in Elias et al., 1997, p. 4).

From then on, there have been many tries to incorporate emotional learning in schools through social emotional learning and character education programs. One example of this takes place in America. As reported by Education Correspondent ‘Alexandra Blair’ (2005), “fifty schools across six countries have been sent guidance covering emotion-related subjects that ought to be taught in secondary schools and activities that could encourage class discussions”. As a result, eight of ten schools in Southern schools in the US reported reduced truancy, nine reported fewer fixed-term exclusions while seven reported improvement in learning in English and maths. Similarly, three schools in Plymouth stated a drop in serious behavior incidents (in *The Times*, 2005) . As another example, in Yorktown High school, teachers observed a positive change in students’ behaviors in terms of understanding their own abilities to self-motivate; persevering during times of heavy workloads; and having the self-discipline to take care of themselves in other areas of their lives. Last but not least, in Stillman Elementary School, positive academic growth has been observed due to social emotional programs (Elias and Arnold, 2006).

#### **How to put these skills into practice?**

How can schools create settings in which the social emotional skills of their teachers and young people can grow? Like many schools all around the world designing and working on different projects on how to integrate EI into their school culture in general and into their curricula in particular, at YADIM, Çukurova University, we also intended to provide an answer to this challenging question by means of “Hand in Hand with Emotions” program.

In this respect, this pilot study aimed at answering the following questions;

1. How much do the language learners at YADIM know about the use of social emotional skills in their lives?
2. Can we help our students to raise their awareness in the use of social emotional skills both in their academic and personal lives?
3. What benefits can such a program bring to the teachers and the students?

#### **Staff Development Unit**

The Staff Development Unit (SDU) at YADIM, Çukurova University, encourages an on-going teacher development by offering the teachers different in-service s such as ‘exploratory learning group-action research ’; ‘induction ’, ‘the course book orientation meetings’, ‘thesis and paper presentations’, ‘academic writing groups’, ‘preparation for KPDS & TOEFL’ ...etc.

Besides these s, in the last few years SDU also offered two different programs, Emotional Literacy Improvement (ELI) and Introduction to NLP, based on the Ph. D. Thesis of two SDU members, in which nearly 35 colleagues have taken part in. This

was because, the informal interviews held with the teachers about the existing programs made sure that the teachers at YADIM needed new in-service programs that reinforce their general competencies related to their social and emotional skills to meet the challenges both in their professional and personal lives. The rationale behind the “Hand in Hand with Emotions” program was revealed during the ELI sessions.

### **Our Study**

At the beginning of 2003-2004 academic year, a new program whose main focus was on how to implement EI and ideas of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) into school culture, ‘Hand in hand with Emotions’ project, was started by the SDU. Six volunteer teachers took part in this program where the main issues related to the subject were covered and discussed by the participants. As a result of this program, it was decided to put the theoretical ideas which were covered during ‘Hand in Hand with Emotions’ sessions into practice. In this way, the program would also be useful directly to students whom were believed to benefit from the outcomes of such a project. There were two main reasons for that decision one of which was due to the results of the informal interviews with the staff members. These informal interviews revealed that some YADIM students had a tendency to drop out from classes especially towards the end of term either mentally (not respond to the lessons attentively), unmotivated about studying/learning or physically (attendance). Secondly, the needs emphasized by the lecturers at different faculties in response to the Needs Analysis interviews carried out to reshape the contents of the EFL program confirmed that some students who finished YADIM, experience some difficulties regarding their self-confidence, social skills, self-awareness and self-motivation when they go to their departments to continue with their freshmen courses.

### **Design of the Study**

#### *Participants*

The ‘Hand in Hand with Emotions’ program included all level classes ranging from Level 1 students that started YADIM as Total Beginner Level of English to Level 3 students started as Intermediate Level of English. These students were from different departments and studying 20 hours of English as part of their academic program at Çukurova University. This intensive language program at YADIM is designed to improve reading, writing, speaking, listening, translation and grammar. Some students (electronics and electrics engineering and mechanical engineering) have to study 100% English medium of instruction while some have to study 30 % English medium or totally Turkish medium of instruction in their fields after completion their language program at YADIM.

#### *Procedure*

This study consisted of two main phases. In the first phase, all YADIM students were given an Introductory EI Seminar to raise their awareness about the EQ concept. The basic aim of this seminar was to give an idea to students about the definition of EQ, where it came from and how it functions in our brain. The students were also provided with some specific examples regarding the use of EI in their personal and future

professional lives. Some stories were used to make the definitions clearer and more interesting for the students. In line with a pre-arranged schedule, all the classes at YADIM were made sure to attend the seminars given at different times of the day during a week. The seminar lasted for one hour and was given in Turkish so that the students could clearly understand what was meant by the concept. Attendance to the seminar was compulsory. Students were asked to do a small EQ quiz which was believed to help them getting into the subject easier before starting the seminar. At the end of the seminar they were given a reflection sheet to write about their ideas regarding the EI seminar and they were expected to keep those reflection sheets in their portfolio files.

In the second phase, the students took part in some comprehensive and easy-to-use written and oral SEL activities in their classes by their classroom teachers. The Syllabus Team and Staff Development Unit decided on the number and the kind of activities the teachers could use in their classes according to different levels. In this way, social emotional skills were infused into the regular academic curriculum so that academic and SEL activities are coordinated and reinforce one another (Zins, 2004).

As can be understood, the support which was expected from teachers was crucial and without their active participation, no such far-reaching try was possible. Therefore, as a final step before starting the project, all YADIM teachers were asked to approve the conduct of “Hand in Hand with Emotions” program, and promised to motivate their students to attend the EQ seminars which are planned to be given and use the activities planned to be integrated into the syllabus. The teachers were also trained on how to implement the materials to be used as part of the classroom activities during the weekly syllabus meetings where they had the opportunity to share their questions and experiences as well as to ask for clarifications about the practice when necessary.

## **Materials**

### ***Questionnaires***

Two questionnaires were used to collect data both from the teachers and the students. The aim of the questionnaire given to the teachers at YADIM was to get their ideas regarding the use of different tasks to be used in this pilot study. That questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions and some selected SEL materials with their aims and procedure, which were decided by the Syllabus Team and the Staff Development Unit. The teachers’ responses to the questions helped the Syllabus Team and SDU to shape the program.

The students were given an open-ended questionnaire to reflect on the EI seminars at the end of the sessions. The questions were in Turkish so that they could understand and respond the questions easily.

### ***SEL Activities***

The materials to be used in the classroom were as in the order of the Table 1. SEL activities that were found to be appropriate for the levels and the needs of students took their place within the syllabus items of the 4<sup>th</sup> block. The block means eight weeks of instruction at YADIM language program.

Level 1: I am / Understanding Emotions / Confidence Exam / Dear Responsible Friend / The Best Day of My Life

Level 2: I am / Understanding Emotions / Confidence Exam / Dear Responsible Friend / How I see It? / Teen Spotlight (Final Project)

Level 3: I am / Understanding Emotions / Confidence Exam / How I see It? / Am I assertive? / Stress Journal / Extra, Extra, Read All About It! / Teen Spotlight (Final Project)

The frequency of the use of EQ activities in the program were decided mainly by considering the students' language level as in the following;

Level 1: 5 activities in the 4<sup>th</sup> Block (Block means 8 weeks of instruction)

Level 2: 5 activities + a final project in the 4<sup>th</sup> Block

Level 3: 7 activities + a final project in the 4<sup>th</sup> Block

Table 1. The SEL Activities

<i>Aiming to improve</i>	<i>Self Awareness</i>	<i>Empathy &amp; Positive Social Interaction</i>	<i>Self Actualization</i>	<i>Motivation &amp; Self Direction</i>
<i>Activities implemented in the classes</i>	1. Understanding emotions 2. I am / Am I assertive?	1. Dear responsible friend	1. Read all about it 2. Confidence Exam 3. Teen Spotlight (final project)	1. How I see it? 2. Stress journal 3. The best day of my life

The SEL activities were done with the guidance of the classroom teacher as parts of the skill classes; that is, reading, speaking, listening classes were practiced using these activities.

*The final "Hand in Hand with Emotions" Project*

A final project, which highlighted the students themselves as individuals, was given as a final task of this pilot study. This project would let them show both their language and personal skills. Also, the final project was thought to be the final part of this pilot study as a mirror both for the students and the teachers.

*The Assessment of the SEL Activities in the Program*

Portfolio System which could document and chart students' growth in proficiency, enable students think critically of their work, enable teachers to review students' progress over time and so on had been implemented since the beginning of the term at YADIM. After the types and the number of the SEL activities were decided by SDU and Syllabus teams, students' portfolio file was found as a better system to follow their development as individual learners.

In that way, students would be evaluated in terms of expressing themselves, thinking critically, discussing and sharing different point of views rather than their grammatical mistakes through their SEL activities in their files.

*The Evaluation of the SEL Activities by the Teachers*

After the implementation of the tasks in the classes in the 4<sup>th</sup> block, different points of views and suggestions for the further studies were discussed with the teachers at weekly syllabus meetings as well as by a volunteer team at summer studies.

**Results**

*Student Reflections - The EQ Seminar*

179 students from different levels of English (Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3) answered the questionnaire consisting of three broad questions on a voluntary basis. The questions were open-ended because more qualitative data were aimed to be collected by the researchers. Students' responses were analyzed by qualitative analysis.

Regarding the first question "What was the most attractive/interesting/effective moment/information during the seminar? Please explain in detail", the students positive reactions can be summarized in four sections; the use of stories, learning about EQ, the format of the seminar, and the content of the seminar. As for the use of stories in the EQ seminar sessions, 110 students wrote positive things that the stories helped them show the importance of the patience (37 students); cooperation (16 students); self-awareness (6 students); controlling of anger (8 students); being determined (2 students); perseverance in the face of difficulties (6 students); awareness of emotional skills (20 students); and sharing (5 students). 45 students out of 179 also wrote positive reflections on learning about EQ. Eight of them had already known the EQ concept but stated that they revised their knowledge and the rest emphasized the importance of the usefulness of EQ in life. 83 students found the format of the seminar well-designed, clear and interesting. Finally, 36 students reported that the content of the seminar was useful, interesting and full of important information. For the first question, on the other hand, only 18 students think that the seminar was boring, dull, and unnecessary for them.

The second question in the questionnaire was asking students to write down what they had learnt during the EQ seminar and what conclusions could be made at the end of the session. 50 students found the EQ as useful and important as the IQ and 26 of them stated that 'self-awareness is the key to be successful in life'. 22 students highlighted the importance of the EQ in interaction while 30 highlighted the importance of empathy. 11 students believed that emotional skills could be improved and 9 students believed that they could motivate themselves. In addition, 19 students reported that high motivation was important to achieve goals. As for the second question, 19 students stated that the seminar did not answer their questions in their mind and the EQ was useless and boring while five students did not comment on it.

109 students wrote 'yes' for the third question, 'Are you planning to implement/integrate the information about EQ you've learnt in the seminar into your daily life as a student? and made explanations for the rest of the question, 'How do you think this information can be used in an effective way?'. 65 students reported that EQ would be very useful for school life so EQ should be integrated into the curriculum. Eight students noted the importance of EQ for student-teacher relations and seven students noted the importance of goal setting activities in classes. 10 students stated that 'self-awareness skills should be practiced more in classes' and 20 students wrote that more EQ seminars should be done. Only three students replied negatively to the third question and three students made no comment. Two students thought that it was

impossible to integrate EQ skills into the education because of the education system in Turkey and two students stated that they did not want to learn these skills at all. Lastly, three students stated that they were not sure about implementing the EQ skills into their daily life.

#### *Student Reflections – The SEL Activities*

Students were required to write down their self-reflections about the portfolio components and their learning process in their portfolio files. The self-reflection sheet also included the activities part asking students to reflect on how they liked and benefited from the SEL activities. Most students reported in their reflections that they found the activities enjoyable and useful because they were different from the course book tasks and they were more authentic. They also emphasized the lexical dimension of the activities because the students learned new words which they could use to express themselves and their feelings. The final ‘Hand in Hand with Emotions’ project - which enabled students to prepare a poster highlighting their self-portrait, greatest accomplishments, and future plans – was found to be the most enjoyable and useful activity by most of the students.

#### *Teacher Reflections about the Program*

The teachers who took part in this program were also asked to reflect on the content and the use of the SEL activities they practiced in class during the weekly meetings. They were not given an extra reflection sheet to write on due to these weekly gatherings. Teachers’ feedback on the activities was noted down for each session by one of the researchers. According to the teachers’ group discussions in the meetings, as for the content, the teachers stated that they were satisfied with this program since the activities encouraged the learners to speak about themselves which also helped them to improve their spoken English as well as their written statements in opinion writing tasks. In terms of the classroom implications, they reported that they were especially happy because the activities contributed a lot to the dynamics of their classes as the students got to know one another better by means of these activities. Moreover, related to the conduct of the activities, in teachers’ view, different students who did not know each other well had the chance to work in different groups and this helped them socialize with one another. In this way, prejudices about people were overcome and the environment for learning English was bettered. Consequently, as their self awareness improved, students started to focus on their vulnerable characteristics to become better language learners.

#### **Conclusion & Discussion**

According to Adelman and Taylor (2000), if schools focus only on academic instruction and school management in their efforts to help students attain academic success, they will likely fall short of their goals. Moreover, as Hawkins claims, "an important task for schools and teachers is to integrate the teaching of academic and social and emotional skills in the classroom" (in Zins, 2004, p.293). Consequently, many researchers in the field suggest that there are connections between school success and SEL and schools can give students ample opportunities to develop and practice



appropriate social-emotional skills and serve as bases from which to promote and reinforce SEL. Related to this, the examples of the relevant findings are available in the literature (e.g., Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987; Hawkins, 1997; Peisgner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Schmitz & Skinner, 1993; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Stevens & Slavin, 1995 in Zins, 2004).

In favor of these arguments, this pilot study was aiming at introducing the ideas of emotional intelligence, namely social emotional learning (SEL), to YADIM students and helping them practice the skills that are integral to their intellectual and emotional development. In this way, it was also intended to encourage the students on the way to become more autonomous language learners.

During the seminars which were held to inform students about the major components of EI and ideas of SEL at the very beginning of the study, it was observed by the researchers that the students were not much aware of the concept and its benefits in real life. According to the results gathered from both the student reflections (about the seminars and the reflections about the materials included in the portfolio files) and the teachers' reflections (in weekly syllabus meetings), the "Hand in Hand with Emotions" program was found to have positive effects on students' academic and personal development.

The first point to draw from the findings of this pilot study was that according to the student reflections, most students reacted positively and enthusiastically to the integration of such a program into their language curriculum and they were eager to use what they learned during the program in their real lives.

As a second point, the student reflections showed that the language learners were more satisfied and motivated when they were given the opportunity to talk about themselves and their personal ideas. In this respect, there need to be more activities and materials in language classrooms which allow students to share their personal needs, interests, thoughts, and their own perspectives. Regarding this need, SDU and the Syllabus Team evaluated the feedback gotten from the teachers at the weekly syllabus meetings and marked the necessary changes, suggestions and additions accordingly. Moreover, a group of volunteer teachers worked on the materials in summer study groups i.e. they evaluated the materials that were used in the 4<sup>th</sup> block and suggested new materials that will be used in the next terms (SDU guided the teachers regarding the use of different sources and web sites at this stage).

Thirdly, the teacher reflections revealed that the teachers were also satisfied with this program in two ways. In teachers' view, on the one hand, the activities encouraged the students to speak and write about themselves which also helped to improve their spoken and written English in terms of language gains. On the other hand, the program contributed to the dynamics of their classes. That is, the students got to know one another better by means of the pair work and group work activities they practiced in classes and some students who did not know each other well had the chance to work in the same groups. This helped them to enhance their social skills as well as to overcome their prejudices about one another. In this way, the environment for learning English was bettered and consequently, as their self awareness was promoted, the students started to focus on their other vulnerable characteristics on the way to become more autonomous language learners.

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