



FACILITATORS AND INHIBITORS TO THE FORMALISATION OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN THE INDIAN SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Emotional literacy which is the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions with competence and respond to those of others in ways that are helpful to us and others is increasingly becoming important in Indian schools. This study attempts to explore the concept of Emotional Literacy which involves a critical review of the literature surrounding Emotional Intelligence and Literacy. The study analyses the importance of introducing emotional literacy curriculum in a result-oriented education system of India where the prime focus is on academic performance.

Background:

The Education system of India has made considerable progress in terms of increasing primary education attendance rate and expanding literacy to approximately three fourths of the population. (NCERT, 2012) According to the World Bank report, 2013, this improved educational system has been a building block for the economic and national development of the nation in the recent years. However, India's education system is an exam oriented system which establishes a strong focus on technical education and values science, and mathematics as core subjects that every primary and secondary student must study. In the current education system of India, students receive 2 years of pre-primary education, 8 years of elementary education which includes 5 years of primary school and 3 years of middle school education, followed by 2 years of secondary education and 2 years of higher secondary education or technical institutes. The system is also characterised by streaming or subject banding which classify students into different groups on progress based on their performance

in the 2 main qualifying examinations held after grade 10 and grade 12 respectively. Students in the primary and secondary schools study English, a second language, social studies, moral or religious education along with the core subjects' science and mathematics and face six written examinations a year for every subject. (NCERT, 2013). Hence, in schools there is a highly competitive exam oriented culture where the school management, educators and students are primarily occupied with academic grades and school rankings. (Giam, 1992). This leads us to the question whether students who study in a result oriented system like this can attain emotional and social competence which also leads to a thought of why emotional competence or emotional education is important in this competitive atmosphere where only their academic performance is considered for their progress in school.

Academic attainment has always been negatively correlated to social and emotional development in the previous era, but various studies by educational psychologists like Mayer & Salovey (1980), Goleman(1995), Maurer and Brackett (2004) have suggested that Emotional Intelligence and Academic Performance could not only co-exist but they are interdependent of each other and an individual could not be fully intelligent with appreciating, understanding and managing their emotions. (Salovey and Mayer, 1980). One of the major future challenges for the Indian education system is to provide the kind of high skilled, creative and adaptable workers who require the complex 21st century skills which is difficult to achieve with the assessment system that is followed currently in India which sets high academic standards but also on the other hand inhibits innovation. In an information and innovation driven global economy , skills like self -acceptance, managing feelings, responsible decision making, empathy, leading on equality and diversity, self-awareness and social awareness and the ability to establish high quality formal and informal relationships should be nurtured in students for them to be successful in their personal and professional lives in the future.(OECD, 2011).Hence the need to build emotionally literate classrooms where students are given a platform to recognise and express their feelings, and are also exposed to the self-regulation of their emotions helps them to deal with the challenges of their own achievement like stress, anxiety, depression and feelings of inadequacy and also understand and appreciate the feelings of others should be realised.

Rationale for the choice of the research topic:

The National Council of Educational Research and Training, (NCERT) which is the apex body for curriculum related matters for school education in India has been trying to

incorporate aspects of affective education or Social and Emotional Development through subjects such as Moral Education or Moral Science which has development of good moral values and interpersonal relationships as one of its main goals. (NCERT, 2013). These subjects have been implemented in all the primary and secondary schools. Although these programs address prevailing problem behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies, bullying, and violence, emotional education which involves the development of knowledge and skills to understand, manage and regulate their personal emotions and to deal with their predicaments has not been emphasised though not ignored. (Crawford and Chua Tee, 1999)

In the recent times, emotional literacy which is the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions with competence and respond to those of others in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others is increasingly becoming important in Indian schools owing to the changing patterns of family and community life where there are more dual income families where the responsibility of bringing up children is relegated to domestic helpers, an increasing number of children from broken homes or divorced families where children find it hard to cope with the disturbed atmosphere around, the smaller role of parents in teaching children to manage their feelings constructively either directly or indirectly through moral codes or patterns of living, the increasing rate of young offenders who fall in the age group of 14-15 who are mostly school dropouts, to help students who are considered less academically inclined (low performers) who often feel lost in this highly competitive zone and are subjected to anger, low self-esteem, depression, and frustration, and also to help high performing students cope with performance anxiety and social stress. (Giam, 1992) The need to incorporate emotional literacy into the curriculum is also due to the impact of technological devices like computers and television which consume a lot of student free time which were previously used for family and social interactions, and also to prevent internalising and externalising problem behaviours. Hence this study focusses on the importance of prioritising emotional literacy in result oriented Indian schools.

The chances of including Emotional Literacy as a separate subject in the school curriculum is unlikely as it would be considered rather intrusive and an extra burden for both teachers and students Daniel Goleman (1995) suggested infusing emotional literacy lessons on emotions and feelings into the subjects already taught. Hence with the present academically demanding Indian curriculum in mind, the idea of using the RULER (Recognising, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing and Regulating emotions) feeling words

curriculum in the English Language classrooms and mother tongue classes was established. This is a well-designed, field tested program developed by Marc Brackett, Marvin Maurer and Francesca Plain in 2004 to enhance social, emotional and academic learning by following a 6 step process exclusively designed for middle school students. The perceptions of teachers and students on using the feeling words curriculum in the classrooms in an effort to create emotionally literate classrooms will also be examined in this study.

Context:

Previous research on EL and its implications in the Asian region has been quite limited although; several attempts have been made to establish the importance of emotional intelligence and its measurement and implications in various educational settings in the Asian context. (Crawford and Chua Tee, 1999; Wang et al, 2012; D'Rozario & Goh, 1998; Tan & Tan, 1999; Subramaniam & Cheong, 2008). In August 2010, the influence that emotional literacy has on problem behaviours in Malaysian secondary schools were studied and the results revealed that EL which was measured in terms of EI was linked to internalising and externalising problem behaviours and served as a moderator between parental monitoring and problem behaviours and hence the need for EL programs using the pedagogy of multiliteracies is discussed. (Liau et al, 2011). McWilliam and Hatcher (2004) in their journal article titled Emotional Literacy as a pedagogical product , suggest that the remarkable rise in the training programmes such as personality development, formal courses and corporate training in soft skills, communication , leadership etc claims that emotional literacy is vital for achieving professional success and successful relationships which emphasises the fact that EL should be integrated into the school and college curriculum.

Review of Literature:

Educational and psychological theories of achievement and research in the late 1960s and 1970s in the field of school education has revealed that both student's cognitive skills (academic knowledge, critical thinking, reading, writing skills) and affective skills or social – emotional skills (Collaboration skills, motivation, confidence, etc) along with quality of instruction of the teacher influenced or determined student outcomes. (Bloom, 1976). Wang, Hartel and Walberg (1993) as a result of the meta analysis of 270 research studies, found out that affective or the motivational factors (emotional competence) had greater effects on school learning and academic achievement than peer groups, classroom instructional methods or the culture of the classrooms. (Bernard and Ashdown, 2011). There have been several

studies which revealed various social-emotional characteristics such as self-efficacy, academic self-concept, peer relationship factors, persisting when faced with challenges , coping with anger and managing emotions to directly influence student learning outcomes such as attention span, competence motivation to learning, reading, writing and critical thinking skills (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1993; Pajares, 1996, Diperna & Eliot, 2002) and also proven research to establish that students with problem behaviours such as achievement anxiety, stress, anger etc demonstrated lower academic achievement (Shure and Spivack, 1980).

All these lines of research led to the formation of a new concept termed Emotional Intelligence (EI) which was first used by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in their scientific article published in the year 1990 where they described EI as a set of skills and competencies which contribute to the accurate appraisal, expression and effective regulation of one's emotions and of others and is also the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life. (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Emotional Intelligence as a new framework began gaining popularity when Daniel Goleman, in 1995 claimed that emotional intelligence had important societal consequences as emotional learning in schools would prevent teenage pregnancies, substance abuse and student drop outs if adults knew how to express and manage their emotions in smarter and appropriate ways. (Goleman, 1995). The Collaborative of Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded by Goleman in 1994 , an organisation which works to advance science and evidence based practise of social and emotional learning (SEL) lists five core social and emotional competencies for a young person's emotional well-being which include self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills and responsible decision making.(CASEL, 2003). Many researchers have attempted to formulate SEL curriculums, which include the Self Science curriculum and the Social Development curriculum by Goleman(1995) in the U.S, and the You Can Do it educational program which is a popular Social and Emotional Development curriculum widely followed in Australian schools developed by Professor Michael E. Bernard who advocates the development of five social and emotional capabilities which includes Confidence, Persistence, Organisation, Getting along and Resilience in young people. (YCDI, 2012).

Emotional literacy (EL) as a concept was developed from the work of Goleman on Emotional Intelligence and although the term Emotional Literacy is used parallel to or sometimes interchangeably with EI, there are significant differences between the two terms, Emotional Literacy was developed as a social construct as opposed to the more

individualistic emotional intelligence which focusses too much on the individual and is often criticized for the way it is measured rationally through EQ tests.(Burman, 2009).Emotional Literacy as a term was first used by Steiner (1997) who claimed that EL has its roots in the field of counselling and defined it as the ability to understand your emotions, the ability to listen to others and empathise with their emotions and the ability to express emotions productively so that emotional situations can be handled skilfully , which helps improves personal power and improves quality of relationships and life around you which Steiner collectively refers to as emotional interactivity.(Steiner & Perry, 1997).The Health, Emotion and Behavior Laboratory at Yale University, in the United States has been conducting decades of research on emotional intelligence and it was researchers like Marc A. Brackett and Marvin Maurer who developed the RULER approach in 2005, an evidence based SEL program in an effort to build emotionally literate schools, where students were given a platform to learn the appropriate emotional language which they will be able to use for in depth conversations and self-expression without difficulties.(Maurer et al, 2004). According to the RULER approach, Emotional literacy includes the knowledge and skills associated with 1) **R**ecognising emotions of self and others, 2)**U**nderstanding the causes and consequences of emotions, 3)**L**abelling emotions with sophisticated vocabulary, 4)**E**xpressing emotions in socially appropriate ways and 5) **R**egulating emotions which involves modifying feelings according to the situation.(Brackett et al, 2011).

In an effort to integrate emotional literacy into the classrooms, three anchors tools which help teachers create a solid foundation for teaching emotional literacy and for enhancing relationships in the classroom was introduced, the anchors include a EL Classroom charter which is a joint mission statement which shows the type of working and learning environment, students, teachers and school leaders would want to work in, the Mood meter which is a simple graph which helps students identify and label their current emotions and feelings with rich vocabulary based on the energy level and degree of pleasantness and the EL blueprint which is an attempt to help students and teachers effectively handle emotionally charged situations by using appropriate problem solving strategies.(therulerapproach.org, 2012).Another important introduction is the RULER feeling words curriculum which is a well-designed and field tested program that Brackett, Maurer and Plain designed to promote social, emotional and academic learning with units and lessons centred on feeling words and related concepts.(Brackett, Rivers, Reyes & Salovey, 2010).This program can be incorporated into the English and language classes and consists of six concrete steps which is specifically developed for middle school students which focusses on the integration of

emotion language and visual imagery as a way to inspire and motivate students to learn to talk about their feelings and those of other people in their social environments. It is particularly aimed at middle schools students aged 10-15 years, as this is the time they experience many dramatic life changes and predictable stresses which disrupt their academic performance and psychosocial functioning. The six steps involve 1.Introduction of the feeling word, 2.Design and personified explanation which associates the feeling word with a design. 3. Academic association 4.Family association 5.Classroom discussion and 6.Creative Writing. (Brackett and Maurer, 2004).The impact of this theoretically based RULER curriculum has been tested in 15 middle schools using an experimental design and results revealed integrating RULER had higher end grades and higher teacher ratings of social and emotional competence(Brackett, Rivers, Reyes and Salovey, 2010),there have also been various studies that provide preliminary empirical evidence that SEL curriculums like RULER improve student outcomes (Elbertson, Brackett and Weissberg, 2010); and reinforces student learning in the English Language Arts classrooms and simultaneously improves 5 critical emotional skills [Recognising, Understanding, Labelling, Expressing and Regulating emotions] (Brackett and Rivers, 2010).

Scope for further research in Emotional Literacy:

An explanatory case study research strategy can be adapted in the future which is an empirical enquiry that deeply investigates a substantive topic within its real life context which in this case is the reasons, significance and the impact of incorporating Emotional literacy (EL) into classrooms in India. (Creswell, 2010). A multiple case study approach that can include both quantitative and qualitative evidence collected from multiple sources which include both public and private sector schools in India. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method of sampling used will be information-oriented sampling or purposive sampling where subjects will be selected based on the expectations on their information content from different school sites to inform the understanding of the researcher in the area of emotional literacy. (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012). The data collection methods that can be adopted in this research could be a mixed method approach since it enables collection of both anecdotal and statistical data which includes both quantitative methods for obtaining numeric information from teacher reports to measure emotional competence, year-end grades, demographic data surveys etc. and qualitative techniques such as open ended in-depth interviews to record perceptions (pre and post) of teachers and students in incorporating EL into the classrooms, so that the final database consists of both qualitative and quantitative

information. (Creswell, 2003). In the data analysis part of a case study research, the researcher relies on his experience and the literature to present the evidence in various ways using various interpretations. (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012).

Conclusion:

Thus this study is expected to bring out the significance of integrating emotional literacy into the classrooms everyday rather than addressing it only when problem behaviours are witnessed. The expected outcomes of this study will be that incorporating EL will help students perform better in academics and increase their year-end grades; EL will prevent or reduce problem behaviour like bullying, substance abuse, violence etc; EL will enhance their social and emotional competence enabling them to bring out effective solutions to manage and express their motions in socially appropriate and smarter ways; EL will reinforce student learning in the English Language and mother tongue classrooms, and it will improve the 5 critical emotional skills.

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Lydia Harrell has 6 years of successful tertiary education experience both in U.K and New Zealand. Lydia is currently doing her PHD at the Faculty of Education, Auckland University of Technology, Newzealand with full scholarship from the faculty. She is the winner of the Faculty of Culture and Society Strategic Doctoral Scholarship (Education) for consecutively two years (2014 & 2015).She has pursued a Masters in International Business and Human Resource Management from Leicester Business School, U.K. She has been involved in teaching business and management courses to undergraduate level students and masters entry level international (South American, Chinese, European, Indian and African) students in various international higher education institutes in London, U.K. She went on to do an English Language teaching qualification (Cambridge CELTA) to cater to the language needs of the international students and improve her teaching methods.

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