

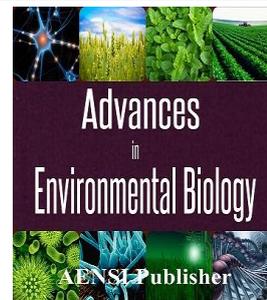


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Implementing Social-Emotional Skills Training in Primary Students

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ABSTRACT

This research is an experimental one which is comprised of two programmes: social-emotional skills training for the teachers and social-emotional skills training for primary students, in order to enhance their social-emotional skills, which was integrated into their existing weekly curriculum by their teachers. The research sample consisted of volunteer teachers at a primary school (fourth and fifth grades, with at least 10 years of teaching experience and a bachelor's degree) who were randomly assigned into two groups: the control group (18 female teachers and 16 male teachers with their students) and the experimental group (20 female teachers and 14 male teachers with their students). The control group consisted of 522 male and 354 female students and the experimental group comprised 513 female and 525 male students. During ten weekly sessions of training, the experimental groups learned a set of social-emotional skills. Bar-On social-emotional scale (youth version) was used as the research instrument. Independent T-test, mixed model of variance, multivariate variance analysis, and regression were used to compare the mean of social-emotional intelligence and its components between and within the groups. The results indicated that training has a significant effect on increasing social emotional skills and its components in students. The results also showed that there is a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. Indeed, to be more effective, emotional skills training programs need to be incorporated into the classroom and should be applied consistently across the curriculum. Teachers' involvement with these skills is also needed to promote their social-emotional abilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Researchers have found that emphasizing the value and importance of cognitive abilities for success in life has been exaggerated [17]. Success is comprised of gaining appropriate experience in all aspects of cognitive, emotional, social, behavioral and biological skills. For the same reason, an appropriate level of cognitive intelligence does not guarantee students' success. Nowadays, the intertwined effect of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors on students' academic performance is indisputable [17].

A lot of research has shown that social-emotional literacy and skills play an important role in children's social, personal, and academic lives and influence students' overall and personal intelligence. In fact, children with higher social-emotional skills tend to have more and greater academic achievements and achieve better quality communication [18,42,45,6,32].

In this regard, schools have a considerable responsibility and are significant contributors in the final success or failure of a person in the adjustment of that person to society. Schools provide a formal and organized environment for children and adolescents to deal with issues, such as children's and adolescents' behavioural problems alongside educational issues, since the most critical preventive programs have their roots in education [7]. As a result, schools are required to pay attention to social and emotional aspects, in addition to focusing on cognitive skills and literacy in students' academic performance [50]. Some authors [19] have emphasized that schools achieve their greatest and highest success in their educational and training goals provided that they incorporate and integrate all their efforts for increasing academic, social, and emotional learning [50].

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The cognitive-social approach is one of the approaches that integrate cognitive development and social-emotional growth by means of adding (belief), self-perception and the expectations of social learning connected together [48]. Mayer and Salovey [31] defined emotional intelligence as the ability to identify and distinguish emotional concepts and meanings and their relationships, reasoning them, solving problems based on them, the ability to receive, perceive, and coordinating emotions and related feelings, understanding information related to emotions, and controlling and managing emotions [30].

Other authors, such as Goleman [23] and Bar-On [4], considered emotional intelligence as a general capacity for emotional and social adjustments.

Bar-On [5] considered that emotional intelligence was a group of non-cognitive skills, talents and abilities (with five intrapersonal, interpersonal, general mood, coping with stress and tension, and adjustment dimensions), which increase a person's ability to confront stress, tension, and environmental requirements successfully.

From the social-cognitive approach perspective, emotion training management in using cognitive and communicative skills for children leads to better and more acceptable interpersonal performance [25]. Goleman [22] believed that emotional intelligence was a set of different skills that can be created through training or teaching and learning in others.

Learning emotional skills begins at home and children start school with different emotional capabilities and competences [31]. As a result, schools encounter challenges regarding training and improving emotional skills. To compensate for these challenges, emotional skills and literacy can be included in the school curriculum and desirable academic conditions can be created [21,4]. According to Goleman [22], schools are the first social places that can modify, correct, and amend children's defects and weaknesses in their affections and social interactions [47].

By systematic consideration of students' social-emotional skills, it is likely that children's academic achievement will increase, the occurrence of problematic behavior will decrease, the quality of each child's communication management will improve, and students will be nurtured as creative, responsible, and cooperative individuals in society [50].

Nowadays efforts are expected to focus on promoting students' and teachers' emotional and social competences so that behavioral problems are prevented and academic achievements are increased at schools by implementing programs with these aims [39,50,16,8,46]. Hence, some researchers have studied the effect of training in social-emotional skills in schools [26]. Research shows that schools which have interventions to increase social and emotional competencies [30]. Indicate that social and emotional skills training increases social adjustment, reduces aggression, reinforces socially acceptable behaviour [43], manages stress [30], and improves and develops social-emotional skills [17].

Despite the necessity of paying attention to the importance of social-emotional skills in education, research and experience show that improving and developing students' social and emotional skills is the "missing part" of efforts in promoting schools all over the world [24].

In addition, other research [29] has shown that curriculum designers have not employed the suitable methods required, instruments, and media (including books) for training and nurturing individuals with the necessary social and emotional skills. Books have dealt with training students in social-emotional skills inadequately, incompletely and temporally [34].

On the other hand, most of the programmes for training in social-emotional skills have only focused their attempts on improving students' academic, social-emotional performance [3,34] while Hoberman and Mailick [27] believed that school administrators rarely assisted or tended to assist students in knowledge, mastery, accuracy, or even the acquisition of such skills and capabilities. This can be one of the reasons for the failure of some of these programmes (for example, training programmes, such as Newsome, Day & Catano, [33]; O'Connor & Little, [36]; Nikoogoftar, [34]), which have not shown a significant correlation between the results of training in emotional skills and academic achievement because the process of academic school education is formed by the interaction among factors, such as school, class, teacher, student, teaching subject, etc. Today, to be successful, the schools, teachers and students are required to support programs that are based on increasing social-emotional skills for both teachers and students for the purpose of school effectiveness [40].

Based on this, to maximize learning capacity and to transform schools to appropriate places and have ideal learning environments, teachers must be aware of and acquire the necessary knowledge about how to use and train students in social-emotional skills in order to function as an effective model for performing intelligent social-emotional actions. However, schools also need to be places where students' social and emotional learning is combined with other types of learning and scientific education.

The present study was formed to investigate some aspects of this necessity. Thus, the main goal of this study was to investigate the role of social-emotional literacy in improving emotional intelligence and the academic performance of students.

Methodology:

This study has an experimental design and is a kind of applied research. In this study, pretest-posttest design was used with follow-up, which examines the degree of its effectiveness by designing a skill-training programme (training social-emotional skills to students by teachers) in order to improve students' social-emotional intelligence.

Sample and sampling method:

The research sample consisted of 68 volunteer male and female elementary teachers (grades 4 and 5) and 1914 of their students who were registered. The teachers had at least 10 years of teaching experience and the bachelor's degree. They were randomly selected into two groups of 34 teachers along with their students (the first group, or the control group, with 18 female, and 16 male teachers and 354 female and 522 male students and the second group, or the experimental group, with 20 female, and 14 male teachers and 513 female, and 525 male students). The students answered questionnaires regarding the adolescents' social-emotional intelligence. Then, the teachers and students of the experimental group were examined by the researcher-made training packages.

Research instruments:

The Bar-On's Social-Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (adolescents' version, 2000) with its short format (30 items), normalized for individuals of 7-18 years old, which could be answered within 10-15 minutes was used. Bar-On obtained its validity using the factor analysis method (5 factors: interpersonal, intrapersonal, stress management, adjustment, and positive feeling scale) and reported a reliability coefficient for sub-scales by the test-retest method (intrapersonal 0.84, interpersonal 0.81, adjustment 0.85, stress management 0.88, and overall emotional intelligence (EI) scale 0.87). The validity of this questionnaire was reexamined using factor analysis by the researcher and four factors were obtained. The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was reported to be 0.73 for intrapersonal, 0.65 for stress management, 0.68 for adjustment, and 0.58 for interpersonal using an alpha cronbach. The criterion for academic achievement was the mean of all subjects' scores of students in the 4th and 5th grades.

Procedure for group training sessions:

In the present study, the skill training programme was taken from Bar-On's theoretical model [4], Goleman's proposed principles [22], the social-emotional learning program (SEL, 2007) and was regulated in two domains of intrapersonal (self-awareness, feelings' management, stress management, decision-making, problem-solving, self-concept, self-confidence, and goal-orientation) and interpersonal (communication skills, verbal, non-verbal, listening skills, self-assertion, empathy, self-disclosure, and conflict resolution).

Firstly, the teachers' skill training program was carried out, which included 10 2-hour sessions (once a week) in which 90 minutes were allocated for training social-emotional skills to teachers and a 15-minute break. Then, the teachers were instructed on how to apply those skills taught in the sessions to students in the classroom for 45 minutes. At the end of each session, teachers received the schedule for training social-emotional skills to students in the classroom. The post-test of social-emotional skills was reexamined two weeks after the end of the experimental interventions and the stability of the effectiveness of the growth of the skills was reexamined three months after training the experimental group.

The data analysis method:

In this experimental research, mixed model designs (experimental design with pretest-posttest with control group), multivariate variance analysis, simple regression, stepwise regression and T-test for independent groups were used.

Results:

In order to evaluate and compare the level of general social emotional intelligence and its components in students (before training), T-tests for independent groups showed that there was no significant difference between the experimental groups in overall emotional intelligence (EI) (Table 1). Multivariate variance analysis (Pillais, Wilks, Lambda, Hotelings, & Roys), a linear combination of variables, did not show significant differences. Univariate test results showed that there was no significant difference between experimental groups in overall social-emotional intelligence and its components (see Table 1).

In order to test the usefulness of the research (training social-emotional skills), first the subtraction of pre-test scores from the post-test scores was calculated for experimental groups, and then the analysis was carried out on the mean of difference scores.

In the test of the difference between experimental groups in the overall social-emotional skills (after training), T-test for independent groups, showed that there was a significant difference between experimental groups in social-emotional intelligence (see Table 2). In addition to this test, multivariate variance analysis and

univariate variance analyses showed that the experimental group had a remarkable and significant superiority over the control group, after training, in all components of social-emotional skills. Univariate tests showed that this significance was due to intrapersonal, interpersonal and adjustment components, (Table 2).

Table 1: Descriptive indexes and univariate tests for examining the effects of between-groups' overall social-emotional intelligence and its components in the subject groups (before training).

Variable	Group	M	SD	N	F	Sig
Intrapersonal	Control	2.194	0.645	611	1.62	0.06
	Experimental	2.134	0.72	851		
Interpersonal	Control	2.802	0.65	611	1.16	0.08
	Experimental	2.90	0.66	851		
Adjustment	Control	2.81	0.54	611	0.196	0.6
	Experimental	2.72	0.55	851		
Stress Management	Control	2.82	0.53	611	2.13	0.052
	Experimental	2.82	0.56	851		
Overall Emotional Intelligence	Control	2.637	0.363	876	0.56	0.34
	Experimental	2.194	0.645	1038		

M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, N=Number of subjects, Sig=Significant level

Table 2: Descriptive indexes and univariate tests for examining between subject effects of social- emotional intelligence (EI) and its components in the students' subject groups (after training).

Variable	Group	M	SD	N	F	Sig
Intrapersonal	Control	0.035	0.82	609	50.46	0.01
	Experimental	0.35	0.85	851		
Interpersonal	Control	-0.088	0.81	609	12.64	0.01
	Experimental	0.058	0.74	851		
Adjustment	Control	-0.048	0.065	609	47.48	0.01
	Experimental	0.18	0.61	851		
Stress Management	Control	0.066	0.67	609	2.59	0.108
	Experimental	0.123	0.65	851		
Overall Emotional Intelligence	Control	0.0081	0.427	609	1.305	0.03
	Experimental	0.218	0.423	851		

In order to test the difference between students' experimental groups in the persistence of the improvement of the overall social-emotional intelligence and its components in the follow-up, the results of between subjects effects test (see Table 3&Table 4), showed that, compared to the control group, the experimental group had no significant reduction; in other words, the superiority of the experimental group in overall social-emotional intelligence and its components was seen in both stages (before and after training) and training students in social-emotional skills had a significant persistence in improving their social-emotional intelligence.

Table 3: Descriptive indexes of overall social-emotional intelligence and its components in the students' subject groups (follow-up stage).

Variable	Stage	Group	Mean	SD	N
Intrapersonal	Post-test	Control	0.035	0.82	609
		Experimental	0.35	0.85	851
	Follow-up	Control	-0.002	0.84	609
		Experimental	0.35	0.86	851
Interpersonal	Post-test	Control	-0.088	0.81	609
		Experimental	0.058	0.74	851
	Follow-up	Control	0.1	0.82	609
		Experimental	0.087	0.73	851
Adjustment	Post-test	Control	-0.048	0.65	609
		Experimental	0.18	0.61	851
	Follow-up	Control	-0.06	0.66	609
		Experimental	0.19	0.606	851
Stress Management	Post-test	Control	0.066	0.67	609
		Experimental	0.123	0.65	851
	Follow-up	Control	0.079	0.66	609
		Experimental	0.185	0.63	851
Overall Emotional Intelligence	Post-test	Control	0.008	0.43	609
		Experimental	0.218	0.42	851
	Follow-up	Control	-0.21	0.44	609
		Experimental	0.206	0.43	851

On the other hand, Pearson's correlation coefficient (before training, see Table 5) showed that overall social-emotional intelligence and the components of interpersonal skills, stress management and adjustment had a significant correlation with academic achievement. The results of a simple regression showed that

students' overall social-emotional intelligence can explain parts of their academic performance and this prediction is significant (see Table 6).

In addition, a stepwise regression showed that interpersonal and stress management components explained parts of the academic achievement and progress.

Table 4: Between subject effectstest of social-emotional intelligence (EI) and its components (follow-up stage).

Variable	Source	ss	df	Ms	F	Sig
Intrapersonal	Group	79.76	1	79.76	55.98	0.01
	Error	2077.1	1458	1.43		
Interpersonal	Group	19.74	1	19.74	16.83	0.01
	Error	17.1	1458	1.17		
Adjustment	Group	42.22	1	42.22	54.08	0.01
	Error	1138.3	1458	0.78		
Stress Management	Group	4.68	1	4.68	5.59	0.01
	Error	1222	1458	0.838		
Overall Emotional Intelligence	Group	34.05	1	34.05	92.46	0.01
	Error	536.9	1458	0.368		

Table 5: Pearson correlation coefficients between variables (the overall social-emotional intelligence, and its components and academic achievement) in students' subject groups.

Variable	Intrapersonal	Adjustment	Stress Management	Interpersonal	Overall Emotional Intelligence
Intrapersonal	1				
Adjustment	*0.159				
Stress Management	0.051	*0.182			
Interpersonal	*0.09	**0.21	*0.065		
Overall Social-Emotional Intelligence	**0.552	**0.71	**0.46	**0.67	
Academic Achievement	0.012	**0.081	**0.101	**0.132	**0.07

Table 6: Analysis of Variance, simple regression, and stepwise regression of academic achievement based on students' social-emotional intelligence (before training).

Variable	Model	SS	df	MS	F	R	R2	Sig
Overall Social Emotional Intelligence	Residual	20.98	1	20.98	6.8	0.07	0.005	0.01
	Regression	423	1372	3.08				
Interpersonal	Residual	74.55	1	74.55	24.48	0.132	0.018	0.01
	Regression	4178.54	1372	3.046				
Stress Management	Residual	125.29	2	62.65	20.8	0.172	0.029	0.01
	Regression	4127.8	1371	3.01				

Simple regression after training showed that the improvement of students' social-emotional intelligence can explain parts of their improvement in academic performance in the experimental group and this prediction is significant (see Table 7).

Table 7: Analysis of Variance, simple regression of academic achievement, based on the improvement of students' social-emotional intelligence (after training).

Model	SS	df	MS	F	R	R2	Sig
Residual	11.95	1	11.95	6.1	0.33	0.11	0.01
Regression	984.1	503	1.95				

Discussion:

Emotional intelligence is a collection of different skills, which can be improved in others through training and learning. Therefore, it is not surprising to claim that schools can be considered as the first centre for nurturing emotional intelligence [22,19,16]. The role of schools in nurturing both academic and emotional capabilities and competences cannot be separated [35]. Recent studies have also confirmed the role of teaching and training in the improvement of emotional intelligence [39,31,2,10,11,22,9,44].

The aim of the present study was to improve emotional intelligence in students. The innovation of this research for social, emotional, and academic learning was integrating training programs for social and emotional skills, both for teachers and students. The results of this research show that the effect of training on improving the overall social-emotional intelligence and its components in students has been significant and persistent. This is in line with the results of other research (for example, Boyatzis, Cowen, & Kolb, [9]; Slaskil & Cartwright, [44]).

Researchers (for example, Duty, [16]) believe that having innate capability of using social-emotional skills at birth in some people enables them to be successful in life's social situations, while this skill should be taught

or trained to some other individuals. It should not be assumed that all students necessarily are adjustable socially and emotionally when they become mature and learn academic skills. Therefore, teachers must make sure that all students have the necessary opportunities for success in the future by teaching social and emotional attitudes in ordinary life. In addition, when students do not have positive role models at home, they cannot learn suitable and appropriate methods for encountering anger, trauma, or failure. Teachers can combine simple methods with their daily lessons in order to provide opportunities for obtaining appropriate attitudes to awareness of self and others' behaviour.

A remarkable number of research papers show that social-emotional skills have a central role in children's social, personal, and academic lives and they influence students' overall and individual intelligence [37]. Students with higher intelligence, who get nervous during exams, may fail the test because they do not know appropriate and effective strategies for dealing with problems [51,43,47]. Children with higher social-emotional intelligence tend to behave using more suitable social methods without violence [15,41].

The ability to judge on stating others' emotions may have a direct relationship with hostility and aggression in children, as aggressive children perceive more aggression in others than non-aggressive children [14]. In contrast, children with the skills to understand others' emotions have more positive social interactions [28]. This is very important because students who are able to improve the quality of managing their social interactions and relationships at school feel more comfortable in the school environment; receive more and better support from teachers and classmates and form a healthier attachment to school [38,1]. Therefore, it is seriously believed that training social-emotional skills to children is one of the important ways of influencing different aspects of students' lives. This research and other research [17] have shown that programs with the aim of increasing social-emotional learning lead to the improvement of students' social-emotional intelligence and their academic performance.

Some of the research [50] has shown that students' social-emotional competence and capabilities lead to the improvement of academic performance in different ways in students who are able to encounter their emotions intelligently, are more self-controlling, have higher self-confidence, attempt more for their learning, are self-motivated, and control their emotions and stresses for reaching their goals and performing their duties and tasks. As some researchers have affirmed, direct intervention in psychological determinants of learning is one of the effective ways of reforming methods [49].

Although the results of this research showed that the effect of teaching and training on improving overall social-emotional intelligence and its components are significant in students, in the follow up stage the subjects' skills dropped off significantly. This can result from different factors. Firstly, training social-emotional skills is a multidimensional issue and its fulfillment requires full and strong support and assistance of the families and school administrators. Moreover, training social-emotional skills as a complex psychological multi-component structure depends on using all the elements involved in such skills and their generalization to real life situations.

Conclusion:

The experience of this research and other research suggests that integrating training and teaching programs of social-emotional learning in the classroom can bring about many benefits outside and, especially, inside the training institute. Schools are places for learning social processes in nature. Students learn, not by themselves, but by teachers' cooperation, peers' help, and family support. In fact, schools that apply programs for learning social-emotional skills bring about an increase in academic achievement, an improvement of the quality of teacher-student relationships or rapport, and the decrease of problematic behavior.

Limitations:

The present study uses self-reporting tests, which could lead to bias in responses. On the other hand, the teachers performed data collection from students, so there is a probability bias in collecting information by the teachers. Due to the complexity of the issue under study, if the date or length of training increases, more effective results, improving emotional intelligence and academic achievement will be expected.

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