

Reading English Textbooks Through the Lens of Emotional Intelligence: A Discursive Perspective

Saumya Sharma

Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is crucial to interpersonal action as it enables understanding of emotions in self and others for coping and problem-solving. Using Goleman's framework on EI, the study analyzes eight lessons from the Class 12 English textbook *Flamingo* to stress the importance of teaching EI. It examines the discursive construction and power of textual characters through their effective use of EI for conflict resolution as found in some lessons in comparison to others, and how EI-based thematic and structural questions can be introduced in all the lessons, thereby enhancing the learners' comprehension of EI as a skill-set for life.

Keywords: Textbook analysis, emotional intelligence, discursive construction, question pattern

Introduction

In the past few decades, a paradigm shift in the social sciences has led to an upsurge of interest in emotions and feelings, making emotions in everyday life a part of social analysis (Weatherell, 2012). A study of emotions allows researchers to comprehend how bonds are created and how individuals attune to others (Scheff, 1990). Although theorists such as Gardener (2011) have defined intelligence as multidimensional, it was only in the 1990s that Emotional Intelligence (EI) was proposed and defined as the ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others and use them to understand thinking and communication (Feldman & Salovey, 2002).

Education and learning have been hugely impacted by affect studies, particularly EI, which permits individuals to understand the appropriateness of emotions in themselves and others, enabling them to navigate social situations successfully (Epstein, 1998). The benefits of EI in education have been extensively researched. EI enables teachers to develop an awareness of their feelings, maintain self-efficacy in teaching practices (Boyd, 2005), mitigate stress and handle work pressure (Vesely et al., 2013) through the help of manuals, guidebooks, symposia, and emotional literacy programmes (Alvarez-Hevia, 2018). EI helps students in classroom participation (Yasin et al., 2022), in their behaviour, social relationships, and academic environments (Keefer et al., 2018), positively affecting their reading and speaking skills and stress management (Zarezadeh, 2013). Overall, EI contributes to critical language teaching since expressing negative emotions might be a learner's way to voice difficulties (in the classroom or outside), thereby assisting in developing one's identity and embodied self (Benesch, 2012).

EI in textbooks has received little attention. Tuncay (2002) makes a plea for redoing textbooks and curriculum to focus on EI since textbooks provide a scaffold to the learners to "organise their learning both inside and outside the classroom" (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994, p. 318) through discussions, activities, exercises, questions, and homework, thus influencing learners' minds and emotions. Jensen (2016) argues for a deeper understanding of emotions through an analysis of rhetoric and composition textbooks. Similarly, two EI components, self-management and social awareness, have been studied in social science and natural science textbooks, although more research is needed (Babaei & Abdi, 2014). In English textbooks, research has mostly examined gender representations (Mills & Mustapha, 2015) but not the use of emotions and EI, except for a study by Ghosn (2002) on the effectiveness of English literature textbooks in developing EI. Thus, to bridge the gap, this study uses Goleman's (1995) perspective on EI and Fairclough's discourse analysis (1989, 1992) to analyze EI in eight lessons in *Flamingo*, an English textbook prescribed by the CBSE board.

Theoretical Framework

Daniel Goleman (1995) popularized EI by asserting that the emotional mind was actively used in making decisions, assessing people, and interpreting the world around us and for developing EI and emotional

literacy. Goleman (1995, pp. 43–44) enumerated five essential components of EI, asserting that students' success in dealing with people in emotional literacy programmes was due to these skills:

1. Self-awareness of emotions consists of understanding and labelling one's emotions across contexts so that the individual can better assess oneself and make more constructive decisions. It included knowing the triggers for feelings and differentiating between thought and action.
2. Self-management is the ability to manage emotions through self-awareness, especially when confronted with doubt, despair, sadness and other negative emotions; it meant being better at controlling one's anger/anxiety and developing tolerance.
3. Self-motivation, that is, emotional control, was the basis for achieving any goal. Emotional control involves developing focus, discipline, and non-impulsiveness in accomplishing one's work.
4. Empathy is the recognition of emotions in other people so that one is better equipped to deal with their wants. Active listening was an aspect of empathy.
5. Social competence is managing other people's emotions and relationships, thereby maintaining harmony and conflict resolution. Exhibiting pro-social traits such as being assertive, democratic, cooperative, and solving problems is a part of this aspect.

Texts and their discourses become sites of struggle for understanding power relations, identities, and emotions (Benesch, 2012); thus, an analysis of EI in textbooks should look at how characters develop and exhibit EI (thereby power) in dealing with situations and people. Texts become agents of transformative change by portraying social identities and social agents through their multiple discourses, thereby enhancing critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992). The present analysis explores the use of EI by characters in each text, their power in dealing with problems, the discourses constructed thereby and the prevalence of EI in the exercises.

Analysis

This study analyzes eight lessons of the Class 12 English textbook *Flamingo* (NCERT, 2022). This book is widely used in Central Board of

Secondary Education schools (www.cbse.gov.in) and impacts learning nationwide. A discursive and EI-based analysis of the lessons reveals two major discourses, one related to the successful use of EI in conflict resolution and the other related to emotions. A third part of the analysis is about the exercises with EI.

Discourses with and without EI

Of the eight lessons, three explicitly contain elements of EI. *Deep Water* by William Douglas is an autobiographical account of his immense dread of drowning and the gradual loss of fright while learning to swim from an instructor. The tale is sated with emotions of self-awareness (fear/anxiety/perturbation/unease) and self-management plus motivation to overcome these, discursively constructing the narrator as a strong individual capable of problem-solving. Many vocabulary items in the lesson denote fear and its gradual removal. Another lesson, *Indigo* by Louis Fischer, showcases Mahatma Gandhi's strategic use of EI elements (empathy and social competence) in understanding the plight of the Indigo farmers in Champaran, mobilizing the Indian lawyers, and fighting against the blatant British exploitation. Gandhi exhibits courage and assertiveness in solving the predicament of the farmers, in perceptively understanding their fear and in managing his own emotions in accomplishing justice, thus creating a pro-social EI-based discourse. A third tale, *The Rattrap* by Selma Lagerlof, revolves around the use of EI in human interaction—Elda, the Ironmaster's daughter, extends hospitality to a petty thief despite knowing he is a robber. He, in turn, is so touched by her empathy and social competence that before leaving, he reciprocates by asking her to return the money to the person he had robbed earlier. The story constructs a pro-social discourse on how Elda's empathy and adeptness in dealing with the thief transforms his behaviour, underlining Elda's strong, powerful, and humane identity. Thus, in the three lessons, social actors in the texts use EI to cope with adversity, emerging as dominant voices using the emotional brain. This aligns with the emotional literacy programmes (Goleman, 1995), where learners engage in problem-solving and gain control over the situation; hence, these stories might strongly impact readers.

Three other lessons are laden with emotions, but the protagonists do not act on them. *The Last Lesson* by Alphonse Daudet and *Lost Spring* by Anees Jung contain empathy. The student protagonist in Daudet's

tale is aware of his anxiety about not completing the homework. He is empathetic towards his teacher, Mr. Hamel's plight, in teaching French for the last time before the German occupation of Alsace. He notes the change in the people present in class, including the teacher, but does not solve any problem. Similarly, Jung is empathetic towards the quandary and aspirations of street children like Saheb-e-Alam and Mukesh without conflict resolution. Likewise, Sophie, the adolescent heroine of *Going Places* by A.R. Barton, exhibits self-awareness of her sadness, disappointment, and doubt in waiting to meet her football idol Danny Casey and realizing her fantasy's non-fulfilment. However, she, too, does not solve the hurdle using EI but limits herself to realizing her emotions and fantasies. Thus, none of the above three stories use EI to resolve; instead, they underscore the emotions of self and others.

The remaining two lessons, *Poets and Pancakes* and *The Interview*, hardly focus on emotions and EI relative to the other stories. However, on closer analysis, Umberto Eco's interview has a subtle undercurrent of feeling when speaking about his academic career and literary achievements that teachers/learners can employ as part of the activity/discussion by teachers/learners.

Text-Based Questions and EI

Critical discourse analysts (Fairclough, 1989) argue that a major goal of studying discourses is understanding the modes of empowerment, transformation and status quo and making users aware of their language choices to empower them (Janks & Ivanič, 1992). This translates to an interaction of power, ideologies and identities whereby social agents speak, act, and behave in ways that maintain dominance. Most literary texts are imbued with sentiments such that they trigger emotional responses among the readers (Lyytikainen, 2017); thus, one of the ways of using EI is by analyzing the discourses of emotions and EI in the texts through the actions of characters and how their identities are created through the power, ideology, and emotion matrix. White (1993) believes that those classes where students' views are asked using authentic questions are more engaging than mere teacher-centric lectures. For this, author-generalization questions and structural-generalization questions are relevant. While the former focuses on the implied meanings by the author, linking the story to real-world situations, the latter delves into authorial choices, why the writer chose to pen the text in a particular

manner and the effects it creates. Text-based and author-generalization questions abound in the three lessons that use EI for conflict resolution. *Deep Water* asks questions about the protagonist's fear of water and how he overcomes it and advises readers to share their experiences overcoming fright. The cornerstone of *The Rattrap* is how the peddler interprets the kindness of the Ironmaster's daughter, what made him change for the better and prompts learners' to share experiences of similar incidents. Similarly, at the end of *Indigo*, a question asked is, "how was Gandhi able to influence lawyers?" (NCERT, 2022, p. 54), which, by extension, entails the qualities of a good leader. Though these questions deal with emotions, none focus on EI skills to cope with the problem and gain control. The questions can be rephrased as below to make them EI-based.

- What EI skills did Gandhi use in putting an end to the British exploitation of Indian farmers?
- How does awareness of fear help Douglas in overcoming his dread of water?
- Use structural-organisation questions to draw learners' attention to the structure of the story in order to understand the importance of EI.
- Why does the author make Elda warmly welcome the peddler despite knowing that he is a thief?
- Why does the author write about swimming again, despite his dread of water? What can we learn about his identity through such an action?
- Why does the author depict Gandhi as a calm and perceptive lawyer? What effect does it have on others?

The lessons have theme-based, author-generalization questions that exhibit EI traits for self and other assessments. However, more questions can be initiated to draw learners' attention to EI skills. For instance, in *The Last Lesson*, there are relevant questions on linguistic minorities and history and changing one's views about something one dislikes, but none on the use of EI. Likewise, in *Lost Spring*, where most questions focus on the conditions of the poor, it is notable that the 'Comprehension' section at the end of the lesson is bereft of discussion regarding Mukesh's sentiments, as seen by the writer. More questions could be penned, such as:

- How does the narrator's perception of his teacher's emotions change his views in the Last Lesson? Recount incidents in which you have been aware of your emotions, and how has this helped you?
- How do we know that the writer is empathetic towards street children? According to you, what does Mukesh feel about his condition?

Even in *Going Places*, there is a question on the dreams and failures faced by Sophie, but the same can be rephrased to include what Sophie learns from her disappointments and how the readers deal with their emotional failures, or why the author makes Sophie think and feel the way she does. Thus, in all the lessons, more EI-based questions allow learners to understand how the characters cope with adversity, maintain power, socially and indirectly use those skills in their own lives. Considering that the preface to the book explicitly states that the book has been designed with "greater consideration for child psychology" (NCERT, 2022, p. vi) and contemplation through discussion, a greater focus on EI would enhance the learners' knowledge of this skill set in text and life.

Conclusion

EI is integral to understanding emotions in self and others and using it successfully in coping with problems. Drawing on Goleman's perspective on EI and its skills, this paper emphasizes the importance of EI in the analysis of prose stories in the English textbook *Flamingo*, on the assumption that discussion about EI can enhance the understanding of the text and EI's use in real life. The findings highlight a greater prevalence of EI in three prose stories that deal with emotions and how their characters use EI for conflict resolution compared to other lessons where the characters exhibit EI traits but do not use it in interaction or coping. However, in all the stories, more thematic and structural questions can be introduced, thereby underscoring the importance of EI in the text and as a life skill.

References

- Alvarez-Hevia, D.M. (2018). A critical approach to emotional intelligence as a dominant discourse in the field of education. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 76(269), 7-23.
- Babaei, B., & Abdi, A. (2014). Textbooks content analysis of social studies and natural sciences of secondary school based on emotional intelligence

- components. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(4), 309-325. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2014.020401>
- Benesch, S. (2012). *Considering emotions in critical language teaching: Theories and praxis*. Routledge.
- Boyd, M.A. (2005). *The emotional intelligence of teachers and students' perceptions of their teachers' behavior in the classroom* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
- Epstein, S. (1998). *Constructive thinking: The key to emotional intelligence*. Praeger.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). Introduction. In N. Fairclough (Ed.), *Critical language awareness* (pp. 1–30). Routledge.
- Feldman, L., & Salovey, B. (2002). *The wisdom in feeling: Psychological processes in emotional intelligence*. Guilford Press.
- Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. (3rd ed.) Basic Books.
- Ghosn, I. (2002). Four good reasons to use literature in primary school ELT. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 172–179.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.
- Hutchinson, T., & Torres, E. (1994). The textbook as agent of change. *ELT Journal*, 48(4), 315–28.
- Janks, H., & Ivanič, R. (1992). Critical language awareness and emancipatory discourse. In N. Fairclough (Ed.), *Critical language awareness* (pp. 305-31). Routledge.
- Jensen, T. (2016). Textbook pathos: Tracing a through-line of emotion in composition textbooks. *Composition Forum*, 34, np. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1113431.pdf>
- Keefer, K., Parker, J., & Saklofske, D. (2018). Three decades of emotional intelligence research. In K. Keefer, J. Parker, & D. Saklofske. (Eds.), *Emotional intelligence in education: Integrating research with practice* (pp. 1-19). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90633-1>
- Lyytikäinen, P. (2017). How to study emotion effects in literature: Written emotions in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." In I. Jandl, S. Knaller, S. Schönfellner, & Tockner, G. (Eds.), *Writing Emotions: Theoretical concepts and selected case studies in literature* (pp. 247-264). De Gruyter.
- Mills, S., & Mustapha, A.S. (2015). *Gender representation in learning materials: International perspectives*. Routledge.
- NCERT. (2022). *Flamingo. Textbook in English for class XII*. NCERT.
- Scheff, T.J. (1990). *Microsociology: Discourse, emotion and social structure*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tuncay, H. (2002). Emotional intelligence in ELT/EFL curriculum. Arts and Social Sciences. *Journal of Istanbul Kültür University*, 1(2), 21–34.

- Vesely, A.K., Saklofske, D.H., & Leschied, A.D.W. (2013). Teachers vital resource: The contribution of emotional intelligence to teacher efficacy and well-being. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 20*(10), 1-19.
- Weatherell, M. (2012). *Affect and emotion: A new social science understanding*. Sage.
- White, B. (1993). Pulling students toward meaning or making meaning with students: Asking authentic questions in the literature classroom. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan, 9*(1), 28-40. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2168-149X.1603>
- Yasin, B., Mustafa, F., & Bina, A.M.S. (2022). Effective classroom management in English as a foreign language classroom. *Journal of Linguistics and Education, 12*(1), 91-102.
- Zarezadeh, T. (2013). The effect of emotional intelligence in English language learning. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences, 84*, 1286-1289.

Saumya Sharma is an Associate Professor at English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Her research interests are discourse analysis and English language teaching.
saumyasharma2@gmail.com