

## **INTEGRATING READING SKILL WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A NOVEL CLASSROOM STRATEGY**

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In this era of internet, students are gradually moving away from the habit of reading books. A time, when carrying a book feels cumbersome for a student, inculcating the habit of reading in them is undoubtedly a tough challenge for any teacher. Taking up this challenge we thought of clubbing reading skill and Emotional Intelligence(EI) in one of our classes. As a first step, a story of Oscar Wilde - ‘The Model Millionaire’ was put before the students for silent reading. Activities were designed to test the comprehension skills of the students. Activities were also designed to test the four areas of Emotional Intelligence(EI) of a student - perceiving emotions, facilitating thoughts, analyzing emotions and managing emotions. Taking into consideration the positive response and the proactive involvement of students, it can be concluded that reading of a short story (in this case) can improve both the subskills of reading and Emotional Intelligence(EI) of students. This paper seeks to elaborate on how these activities were executed in the classroom, what was the outcome and how it benefited the students. Thus as English teachers in technical colleges, we can attempt to enhance the language skills of students to make them employable and can also improve their EI so that they are able to sustain in their jobs for a longer time.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The trainer in a language classroom is always in the look out of novel strategies to make the class interactive and interesting. In this context integrating reading skills and Emotional Intelligence (EI) was an innovative idea. Though a young theory, EI has been at the centre of several researches. Goleman has conducted research to show that Emotional Quotient (EQ) plays a more important role than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) in shaping one’s career. Shipley, Sharon and Jackson have tried to show a positive correlation between EI and academic performance in one of their research papers “The Effects of EI, age, work experience and academic performance”. Bringing in EI to a Language classroom would be the highlight here. On an experimental basis we started with clubbing EI in one of the language skills development class i.e reading skill in our college, C V Raman College of Engineering. One of the oldest technical colleges in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of the state Orissa, and affiliated to the university of BPUT, it offers courses in eight engineering branches. We randomly selected only two streams of engineering (electrical and mechanical) and included them under the ambit of our study.

## STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVE

As ESL (English as Second Language) trainers in technical colleges we endeavor to inculcate all the four skills of language in the students. But the productive skills of language learning (speaking and writing) are given more emphasis compared to the receptive skills (reading and listening). Being language teachers we also forget that the receptive skills indirectly and unconsciously help in the acquisition of the productive skills. Speaking with a neutral accent and proper intonation is possible only when we listen to correct pronunciation. The same is applicable for reading and writing skills. The receptive skills are often neglected in a classroom. Listening to the teachers in and outside the classroom at least contributes to a bit of listening but reading as a skill is truly neglected. Making the students aware of reading and giving them a reading list as home assignment does not really serve the purpose. From time to time reading should be made a part of classroom activities. The reading class can be made interesting by selecting short reading passages which can hold the interest of

the students and can be completed within the stipulated hours of the class. Interactive activities should be made a part of all the three stages of reading- pre reading, while reading and post reading. The aim of the activity should be clearly stated at the beginning. Skimming and scanning questions must be incorporated as a technique for understanding the text. The students should be inspired to guess the meaning of difficult words from the context and the trainer should come to their rescue at places where the students fail by providing hints and clues. Moreover, reading skills can be clubbed with Emotional Intelligence to give it a different flavor and a different dimension, which will be challenging for learners at the level of B.Tech. Bringing in EI to a language classroom will definitely help the students understand and comprehend the passages better.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. The term EI was first used in 1980s in a couple of research papers. But this idea was brought to the mainstream by Daniel Goleman through his book *“Emotional Intelligence - Why it can matter more than IQ”* (1995). In this book Goleman has brought in the idea that IQ contributes only 20% to a successful life. The rest goes to

the credit of EQ. This is the whole intention behind bringing in EI to a language learning classroom. Nada Salem in one of the articles *“Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement”* (2000) has brought in the idea that there is a positive correlation between EI and academic success. Emotionally intelligent people are likely to climb the ladder of success within a short span of time. In a language classroom we help the students to enhance their communication skills to help them get a good job and developing their EI would help them thrive in their job for a longer time. So the need of the hour today is to integrate Emotional Competencies to classroom teaching.

According to Goleman, all the students should have the ability to understand their own emotions, control their emotions, manage social relations and understand others' emotions. Several tests and inventories have been developed by different researchers to test the EI of students. But our intention here is not to test and classify the students on the basis of their EI. The purpose here is to make the students aware that they need to understand their own emotions as well as others and act accordingly. Research has shown that people with emotional incompetence face a lot of problems in handling both personal and social problems (Shipley, Sharon and Jackson) .

So there is a need to develop the emotional intelligence of students to help them interact constructively with their own self and others. If as individuals they understand emotions such as anger, grief, fear etc then they can respond correctly when someone else experiences the same emotions.

In a technical college like ours, the students spend more than 80% of their time in studying the technical subjects. Hardly do they find any time to read the literary texts which can contribute to the development of their EI. They make deliberate attempts to improve their IQ which would help them get good placements but they forget about improving their EQ which would help them sustain their jobs for a longer time. We as language teachers in technical institutes should take the responsibility of improving the EI of the students. Developing EI in isolation would be difficult for the trainer so we thought of combining reading skills with EI. Instead of going for a quantitative analysis of the EI of students, we tried to enhance their level of emotional competency by putting them in some emotionally charged situations. Their responses then can be weighed with objectively correct responses to the situation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose we selected a short story and not a novel, as novel would be too long for a reading activity to be completed in a lab class of 120 minutes. It would also be difficult to hold the interest of the students for a long time. So we selected a short story of Oscar Wilde “The Model Millionaire” to suit our purpose. This story is full of suspense and nothing is clear till one reaches the end of the story. The protagonist of the story Hughie is in love with a girl called Laura. But he cannot marry her because he does not have the requisite money i.e. 10,000 pounds which the girl’s father wants him to possess. With a heavy heart Hughie goes to meet his artist friend, Trevor, who is busy drawing the portrait of a beggar in his studio. Hughie is so much emotionally moved by seeing the beggar in rags that he offers him a sovereign during Trevor’s temporary absence. Later in the evening when Hughie and Trevor meet, Trevor reveals that the person whom Hughie had given a sovereign in the morning is actually a millionaire, to be precise the Baron of Hausberg. It comes as a shock for both Hughie and the readers. Hughie laughs at his uncalled for sympathy. At the end of the story again the readers and Hughie are taken by surprise when the messenger from the Baron hands over a cheque of 10,000 pounds to Hughie as a wedding present.

In the story Hughie could understand the grief and pain of the beggar and offered him the only sovereign that he had in his pocket only because Hughie had realized his own emotions of being a destitute and not being able to marry his girlfriend. At the end the Baron realized the position of Hughie and gave him a cheque of 10,000 pounds so that he could marry. The Baron felt the pain of Hughie only when he heard the pathetic story of Hughie from Trevor. Hughie’s giving a sovereign to the model beggar is a manifestation of his empathy because he gave the money to the beggar when he didn’t have any money left for his own transport. Assuming that the perception of sympathy and empathy is subjective, the Baron’s attitude towards Hughie can be considered mere sympathy and may be offering him a job would have been more empathetic.

Making an attempt to make the students understand the qualities of empathy and sympathy, the story was introduced to the students. The students were asked to read the story in parts and at the end of each part some questions were asked to them to check their understanding of the text. The questions were of mixed variety including very short answer type, multiple choice, true and false and fill in the blanks. This was done to avoid the monotony in answering the questions. Finally arranging sentences in the proper sequence as they occur in the text was a

question for the students. Some pre reading and post reading activities were also included to spruce the anxiety of the students. After this some activities related to the development of EI were also designed and executed in the classroom. This test was in the form of a questionnaire with multiple options. All the activities on reading comprehension and EI have been made a part of this paper in the form of appendix. The students were supposed to present their opinion by ticking the correct one as per their perception. Then these responses were analyzed and an objectively correct response was discussed. In this story basically the concept of empathy was brought in to the students. The difference between sympathy and empathy was discussed in relation to the text.

In the beginning of the semester this short story was taught to the Mechanical students without the activity on EI and the same story was given to the Electrical students along with the activities on EI to see the difference in the attitude of the students. There was a glaring difference in their behavior. The Mechanical students could reach a superficial level of understanding of the text but the electrical students went up to the heights of empathy. To further testify this we continued reading activities with both the groups; Mechanical students without EI activities and electrical students with activities on EI. Different emotional competencies like assertiveness, patience, adaptability, optimism, commitment were included during the reading activities for electrical students and mechanical students practiced reading skills without activities on EI. This was done intermittently over three semesters.

## **RESULT ANALYSIS**

Finally to test the reading comprehension skills of the students a common test was administered for both the groups. A reading passage with comprehension questions was taken from their course book “*An Introduction to Professional English and Soft skills*”(275-276). It was a passage on ‘Cultural Conditioning’. Out of 40 about 35 of the electrical students had scored above 90% marks as opposed to Mechanical students where only 03 students scored above 90%, 05 students scored above 85% and the average were between 60-65%. The second objective of introducing EI was tested during the campus interviews. 50% of the electrical students were found suitable for the job where as only 10% of the mechanical students could meet the expectations of the HR. Thus the results of the campus interviews and the feedback given by the HR of different companies confirmed this idea that understanding the emotional competencies gave the electrical students an upper hand over the mechanical students.

## **CONCLUSION**

The results have really made the researcher optimistic that clubbing EI with reading skills can be a novel strategy in an ESL classroom to develop the reading comprehension of students and can also strengthen their emotional competencies. Thus integrating EI with reading skills can definitely help students understand and analyze emotional and social skills better and would help them lead a healthier life in future. The results of the study so influenced the Management of CVRCE that it was decided that EI would be permanently included in a Language learning classroom; the intention being to produce good human beings along with engineers. So including EI in a language classroom may be recommended for inclusion in the curriculum of technical students.

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