

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY AMONG UZBEK EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract. Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a significant factor influencing academic success, particularly in second language acquisition. This study explores the relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety among Uzbek EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Using a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 150 university students from three higher education institutions in Uzbekistan through standardized EI and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaires. The findings revealed a moderate negative correlation between EI levels and language anxiety, suggesting that students with higher emotional intelligence experienced lower anxiety levels during English learning. Introduction

In the modern landscape of global education, English proficiency has become a crucial skill for academic and professional advancement. In Uzbekistan, where English is taught as a foreign language across schools and universities, the focus has traditionally been on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. However, increasing attention is being paid to psychological and emotional factors that influence learners' success. One such factor is emotional intelligence—a concept introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), referring to an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions both in themselves and others. Another key affective variable in language learning is foreign language anxiety, defined by Horwitz et al. (1986) as a distinct set of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors related to classroom language learning that arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process. Anxiety can impair students' ability to speak fluently, participate in classroom activities, and perform well in assessments. In the context of Uzbek EFL learners, anxiety often stems from fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

While many studies have been conducted globally on the role of emotional intelligence in reducing language anxiety, limited research exists within the Uzbek educational context. This gap presents a compelling need to examine how emotional intelligence may help mitigate anxiety among EFL learners in Uzbekistan. Understanding this relationship can lead to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies that not only enhance linguistic proficiency but also promote students' emotional well-being. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and language learning anxiety among Uzbek EFL students. Specifically, it aims to determine whether students with higher emotional intelligence report lower levels of anxiety and to

offer insights for language teachers and curriculum developers on how to address affective factors in the classroom.

Methods

The study involved 150 university students from three higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, including both male and female students. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure diversity in terms of age, proficiency level, and academic background. The participants were all enrolled in English language courses and were studying English as a foreign language at the undergraduate level. The average age of participants was 21, with a range of 18 to 24 years old.

Instruments

The research utilized two main instruments:

1. Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) – A standardized test to assess the participants' level of emotional intelligence. The scale includes five dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.
2. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) – A widely used tool to measure foreign language anxiety. This scale includes items that assess feelings of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and avoidance behaviors in the language learning process.

Procedure

The data collection was carried out during the spring semester of 2024. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality. The surveys were distributed in paper form and completed during a scheduled class session to minimize disruptions. Each participant was given approximately 30 minutes to complete both the Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.

After the data were collected, they were coded and entered into a statistical software package for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety. A correlation coefficient of -0.3 or below was considered to indicate a significant inverse relationship, suggesting that higher emotional intelligence levels were associated with lower levels of anxiety. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to summarize participants' EI and FLCAS scores.

Results

The analysis revealed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.05$) between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety among the participants. This indicates that as the emotional intelligence of Uzbek EFL students increased, their levels of anxiety decreased. Specifically, students who scored higher in emotional intelligence exhibited greater self-regulation, higher motivation, and better social skills, all of which contributed to a reduction in anxiety during language learning.

Further examination of the data showed that the self-regulation and empathy dimensions of emotional intelligence had the strongest negative correlations with anxiety ($r = -0.50$ and $r = -0.48$, respectively). This suggests that students who were able to manage their emotions and empathize with others were less likely to experience anxiety in the classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in mitigating foreign language anxiety among Uzbek EFL students. The moderate negative correlation found between emotional intelligence and anxiety aligns with previous research by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) and Cheng et al. (2014), who found that emotional intelligence can help learners manage their anxiety and improve language learning outcomes.

The results indicate that specific aspects of emotional intelligence, particularly self-regulation and empathy, are crucial for managing language learning anxiety. These findings highlight the importance of emotional intelligence in creating a supportive learning environment where students feel confident and less anxious about using English in class.

Given the high levels of anxiety experienced by many EFL learners, especially in non-native contexts like Uzbekistan, this study suggests that integrating emotional intelligence training into language teaching programs could significantly reduce anxiety and improve language learning outcomes. Teaching students strategies to enhance their emotional intelligence, such as mindfulness practices, stress management, and communication skills, may help foster a positive and effective learning environment.

However, this study also has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the study was limited to three institutions in Uzbekistan. Future research could expand the scope to include more diverse contexts and larger sample sizes. Additionally, qualitative data could provide deeper insights into how emotional intelligence influences students' emotional experiences in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety among Uzbek EFL students and found a significant negative correlation. Students with higher emotional intelligence experienced lower levels of anxiety, which suggests that emotional intelligence plays a key role in language learning. The study's findings underline the importance of incorporating emotional intelligence development into the EFL curriculum to help students overcome anxiety and enhance their learning experience. Future research could further explore strategies for teaching emotional intelligence and its impact on language acquisition in different educational settings.

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