

Developing Emotional Intelligence for Secondary School Students through Teaching Literature

Hoang Thi Mai¹

Abstract

The establishment of the science of emotional intelligence has opened up new horizons for the teaching of literature in secondary and high schools. By applying modern Psychology and the new studies by Daniel Goleman on emotional intelligence; analyzing the standard output and investigating the reality of teaching and studying literature in Vietnam, England, the USA, the paper analyzes the power of literature in developing students' emotional intelligence. Moreover, the paper recommends solutions for exploiting the potential of Literature in developing students' EI regarding supplementing and adjusting learning objectives, standard output, content, teaching methodologies, and testing and assessment.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, literature, reading, teaching, secondary students.

Introduction

The issue of emotional intelligence (EI) and how it is taught in schools has attracted significant concerns from researchers in recent decades. According to modern psychologists and educators, in addition to academic competence (IQ), EI (or EQ) needs to be considered as a new measurement of human competence and values. Experiments by bio-sociologists also confirm that it is sometimes not, intelligence but emotion that helps human beings face dangers, loss, pain and disappointment. Each emotion prepares people for actions and shows people how to conquer challenges to survive (Goleman, 1995).

However, society in general and schools in particular have not paid efficient attention to EI. In Vietnam, schools tend to teach theoretical knowledge instead of skills, especially EI. Consequently, while Vietnamese students' IQ is quite high (illustrated by PISA 2015, OECD 2015), their EI seems to decrease. Particularly, teenage criminals have been increasing alarmingly. In contemporary society, for different reasons, children and teenagers are becoming more and more isolated, nervous, bored, stressed, or hot-tempered, furious, stubborn, and even aggressive. Such matters have spread globally and Vietnam is not an exception (Daniel Goleman, 1998).

With regards to these things, our research questions are: What is EI? What are its role in secondary students' lives? Is it necessary for education of EI to become a separate subject in secondary schools? What is the role of literature in developing students' EI? How to exploit the potential of literature in developing students' EI?

Definition of Emotional Intelligence

There are a wide range of definitions of EI. According to Salovey và Mayer (1997), "*EI involves the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth.*" (Salovey, P. Sluyter, D.J., 1997, p.10). Goleman (1998) defines EI as the ability to reasonably and effectively control and express emotions in order to encourage people to cooperate for general objectives. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) confirms that emotional intelligence is your ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and your ability to use this awareness to manage your behaviour and relationships.

¹ Associate Professor, Hong Duc University, Vietnam; No 565 Quang Trung, Dong Ve Ward, Thanh Hoa City, Vietnam; Email: hoangthimai@hdu.edu.vn.

According to Stein and Book (2011), emotional intelligence is “*A set of emotional and social skills that influence the way we perceive and express ourselves, develop and maintain social relationships, cope with challenges and use emotional information in an effective and meaningful way.*” (Stein, S. J. & Book, H., 2011, p.13).

Generally, in spite of being seen from different perspectives, all these researchers agree that EI is the capability of recognizing, understanding, managing and effectively using emotions in order to self-develop and cooperate with other people to obtain the target aims.

Emotional Intelligence Model

An emotional intelligence model has been approached from a variety of directions. From the skills perspective, Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2001) propose an EI model involving 4 skills: *perception of emotion, use of emotion to facilitate thinking, understanding of emotion, management of emotion* (Mayer, J.D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D., Sitarenios, G., 2001, p.234). From the complex perspective, Goleman (1998) divides an EI model into basic competences, including 1) self-awareness, 2) self-regulation, 3) motivation, 4) empathy, 5) social skills. In this paper, the theory of EI model by Goleman (1998) has been applied to evaluate the power of literature in developing secondary students' EI.

Advantages of Emotional Intelligence to Secondary Students

In late 20th century, researchers reached the surprising conclusion that IQ stands behind EI in contributing to job success. They estimated that only 20%, 10%, even 4% of work achievement is based on IQ (Daniel Goleman, 1998). Such statistics are still controversial among scientists. However, the ideas that “IE is an advantage of competition” and “Conquering EI is the ultimate deciding factor of a person's success” are theoretically and realistically based.

Secondary students are from 12 to 18 years of age. At this age, their brains and bodies go through a lot of development. However, because their emotions are not balanced, they often suffer from mental disorders. As calculated, one out of three teenage boys experiences symptoms of stress and the number is double among girls. Therefore, if teenagers are equipped with EI competence, they can easily adapt to changes; feel more confident and be positive in attitude; manage their pressure, reduce stress level; learn from mistakes; and increase creativity. Moreover, EI helps students improve their communicative skills, have better empathy skills, learn how to respect and get respect from others. EI also helps students to recognize strengths, weaknesses, career trends, and improve career prospects. Experiments have shown that students with the same IQ produce various study results owing to their EI. It is, frequently, not IQ but EI that provides individuals with tools to fight with challenges and catch opportunities (Daniel Goleman, 1995, 1998).

Significance of Literature in Developing Secondary Students' Emotional Intelligence

Literature and reading are two subjects that can help develop students' EI. This is because literature is the voice of emotions and feelings. Each work of literature is a treasure of human emotional experience and emotional intelligence. “*Literature may offer us an emotional outlet*”; “*A great work of art may provide us the opportunity to feel more profoundly and more generously, to perceive more fully the implications of experience, than the hurried and fragmentary conditions of life permit*” (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 44, 45).

Reading and studying literature help students to have better self-understanding and self-awareness

Self-awareness, according to Goleman (1998), is the ability to know one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and goals and recognize their impact on others while using feelings to guide decisions.

Literary works, according to Literary theory, is the “surgery” of human's spiritual world. Emotions and thinking processes which are naturally intangible are perceived through sounds, languages, and colours in literary works. Literary works act as a screen which preserve, exaggerate and lengthen a mental moment for the purposes of observation and reflection. Human emotions are clearly expressed through literature, such as Ah Q's thirst for love in *The True Story of Ah Q* by Lu Xun; and Andrei Bolkonsky's pain, boredom and disappointment when he came home from the battle and witnessed his young wife's death in *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. Their delicate changes of moods are presented as in slow-motion movies, which are likely to be touched. Recognizing and analyzing such spiritual changes may help students to experience and accumulate their emotions in order to be aware of their soul's limitations in different situations. Moreover, while reading a literary work, readers have a chance to live the life of characters, from the beginning till the end of an incident or a situation.

Todorov (2007) indicates that characters in books possibly become faithful partners because they are more realistic than real people (Tzvetan Todorov, 2011). Therefore, reading/studying literature is not only receiving but also experiencing, explaining various situations, fates, and lives. By doing so, readers can reflect their own strengths, weaknesses, trends, values, and objectives in reasonable attitudes and behaviours.

Reading/studying literature helps students to manage and self-regulate their emotions for success in social relationships.

According to Goleman (1998), self-regulation involves controlling or redirecting one's disruptive emotions and impulses and adapting to changing circumstances. Experiments by psychologists also prove that those who are unable to control and self-regulate their impulses are frequently lonely, confused, and non-flexible to pressures. They are also less determined in pursuing target objectives (Daniel Goleman, 1998). Literary works are always a debate about human life, character opposition, personality conflict, and the writer's arguments over various phenomena. As U. Eco (2004) indicates, one of the functions of stories is to oppose readers' intentions of changing fates. They force readers to touch something that they can not change, which is a necessary lesson for students. By reading literature, students both experience tough incidents and get involved in debating, solving problems from the perspectives of the insiders and outsiders who observe, comment and give decisions. Literature's influences do not occur immediately, which can not transform a bad person into a good one after a short time, but they enhance people's awareness of evils, fear, atrocity, and sin. Literary works illustrate negative attitudes and behaviours such as Holden Caulfield's habit of cursing in *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger; the spiritual victory of Ah Q; the envy, lies, deception, and tricks of Iago, and the jealousy of Othello in *Othello* by Shakespeare; the mischief, recklessness, tricks, meanness, and fierceness of Fedor Pavlovic, as well as the hatred among family members and the action of killing the father of Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*. These illustrations may not immediately stop bad habits or sins among students but they can help prevent them or, at the very least, encourage students to fight with these evils. In this regards, reading literature is an opportunity for students to recognize and self-regulate negative emotions.

Literature provides students with life-long motivations

According to Goleman (1998), emotions drive people to achieve for the sake of achievement regardless of any obstacles and failures. Experiments by psychologists and biologists confirm that "The links from the limbic emotional center to the cerebral cortex are far more thoughtful than those in the opposite direction." Therefore, "emotions are often a stronger factor in influencing our behavior than logical thinking" (Colin Rose & Malcolm J. Nicholl, 1997).

Along with theatre, cinema and music, literature inspires strong emotions from readers. Each literary work can illuminate people's soul, reflect their actions, change our perspectives and encourage people to take actions. By appraising good and beauty, literature nurtures human belief and an optimistic mood. Being the product-of-beauty, literature make the human soul more delicate and sensitive. Nice actions, dreams, desires burn up passion and a thirst for these things in the reality. Strong emotions evoked from literary works are motivations for people to obtain goals in their career and life. It is the typical intangible power of literature and arts.

Reading/studying literature enhances students' empathy

Empathy as defined by Goleman (1998), is not only sympathy but also the ability to consider other people's feelings especially when making decisions. A lack of empathy may worsen a doctor's treatment; a service staff's performance, a manager's competence. In recent context, while cooperation and connection among individuals are vital for existence and development (Daniel Goleman (2006), those with the ability of putting oneself in someone else's position and consider one incident from both the insider's and outsider's perspectives have more opportunities to gain success.

The primary root of a literary work is the writer's empathy to life. The content of these literary works shows the empathy between the characters, as well as between the writer and the characters. "Literature extends to the horizon of interaction with others", so students' empathy may be revealed and developed (Todorov, 2007). All signals of emotions, experiences, moods, feelings, and behaviours can be found in literary works such as Kieu's painful mood when granting her love to her sister, Van or Van's silent bitterness on "re-union day" in *Kieu Story* by Nguyen Du; the calculations for murdering, and the complicated mind of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*.

By thoroughly studying writers' attitudes towards their writing; by recognizing and explaining signals of emotions and feelings of characters, students are provided with chances to put themselves in different contexts so that they can understand and sympathize with literary characters and then with people in reality. Consequently, students know how to help others. In this regards, teaching students how to sympathize is a noble mission of literature.

Reading/studying literature practices students' social skills

According to Goleman (1998), social skill is the ability to thoroughly understand the society; the ability to control conflicts, negotiate and solve disagreements; the ability to openly listen to and persuade others; the ability to cooperate with others and manage relationships in order to move people in the desired direction.

Emotions are a deciding factor to effective communication. Knowing how to transfer information in an emotional and sensitive way increases persuasion and influences listeners. Literature is born from a community of lively voices with various characteristics. It is not random, and its border continuously changes. Being a collection of human experiences in relationships, literary works do not only widen knowledge of politics and society but they also help students be more well-behaved. Studying literature is an ideal opportunity for students to practice their listening skills, facial expressions, and voices. They also practice gestures through activities like story-telling, role-play, presentation, and team debate. The ability of giving presentations and persuasion are considered as advantages of success. Being a subject of language arts, literature has a lot of advantages in providing students with these skills.

Emotional Intelligence and Suggestions for Teaching Literature at Secondary Schools

Developing emotional intelligence needs to be considered as a particular objective; an important standard output of reading and teaching literature at secondary schools.

Human ethics are "fragile" (Todorov, 1999). The border between Good-Bad, Noble-Ignoble, Beauty-Ugliness, True-False is vague. Hence, developing emotional intelligence is the foundation for students to manage and maintain moral principles which have been socially accepted in order to exist and "live with others". Being a subject of human feelings and emotions, literature needs to develop students' emotional intelligence. In other words, developing students' emotional intelligence must be identified as a particular objective; an important standard output of reading and teaching literature at secondary schools. Studying the standard outputs of *Language Arts* at secondary schools in Vietnam, USA, and England (*Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo (2006)*, California Department of Education (2015), GOV.UK. (2014), National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (2010)) shows that the matter of developing students' emotional intelligence has not been sufficiently considered. The focus of their standard output is more about recognizing, analyzing and evaluating genres and artistic principles of text. In France, as Todorov observes, sessions of poem reading, or story reading do not help students to "think about human fate, individuals and society, love and hatred, happiness and disappointment... but about concepts of classic and contemporary criticism. Students do not study to understand literary works by themselves, but to learn about what critics talk about literary works." In Vietnam, the situation is quite similar to that in France. Instead of helping students to find the real meaning of works – to have an insight into human beings, the surrounding world and oneself, and to discover the multi-colored beauty of life through literature – teachers mainly explain information and characteristics of text. Students are not allowed to experience; express their emotions, thoughts and evaluation of characters and works. Teachers' lectures and students' writing are uniformed. Emotional literary works become strange texts to students. As a result, Vietnamese students have become more and more bored, even afraid of *Language Arts* and reading literature. Despite studying a variety of emotional works, students still cannot recognize and appropriately express their own emotions. They tend to borrow others' emotions in writing papers and appear to become insensitive and selfish. Hence, in order for the advantages of literature to be promoted, students need to be taught how to understand characters, and works in order to gain more understanding of themselves. By doing so, they can develop their souls and personalities, also they can more effectively communicate with different people. Such outcomes should be one part of the objectives and standard output of *Language Arts*. These outcomes should also be one criteria for selecting literary texts at secondary schools.

Providing students with opportunities to experience and communicate with characters and works must be an indispensable part of reading/studying literature at secondary schools.

Reading literature is a process in which readers interact with text to comprehend the meaning of works. The meaning of literary works do not only lie in the text but is the result of transaction between text and readers. The communicative mechanism between readers and text is described by Rosenblatt (1938) as followed:

“Through the medium of words, the writer attempts to bring into the reader’s consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. (The extent to which these are socially determined will, it has been said, be a later topic for discussion.) These, and many other elements, interacting with the peculiar contribution of the work of art, produce a unique experience. We must be constantly aware of the living and un-stereotyped nature of the reading experience, made up as it will be of many complex elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination” (Umberto Eco 1984, p.36).

In short, in order to comprehend literary works, students must experience and interact with the text. To draw the meaning of the text, students need to experience, express and evaluate the characters and the works.

In the real context of teaching literature at Vietnamese schools, students are taught how to understand literary works from the perspectives of critics. The objectives of encouraging students to experience and use text in new role-play situations seem to be ambiguous. For instance, we can see the gap between the way two similar fairy tales *Tam Cam* and *Cinderella* are taught at Vietnamese schools and American schools. The objectives of *Tam Cam* in the book *Language Arts* grade 10 in Vietnam is limited to help students “understand the fight between Good and Evil, the dream of the victory for Good against Evil, the optimistic moods and humanity expressed in the tale.” However, students’ emotions, demands, and thirst for more comprehension are not satisfied. Some more questions should be encouraged such as “*To what extents should the step-mother be sympathized? What do you like and dislike about Tam? If you were the step-mother or Tam, what would you do differently? What is your opinion of taking revenge? What do you like and dislike about the tale?*” A student who lives with his/her step-mother would have different views in comparison with one living with his/her biological mother. Such differences in emotions, thoughts, and opinions should be encouraged. By sharing opinions, students can recognize their strengths and weaknesses, and from this, their thinking and personalities can be developed. However, sessions of reading literature and studying literature at Vietnamese schools have not provided students with these opportunities. The gap between schools, society, and students is still significant.

Developing emotional intelligence does not need to be a separate subject but needs to be integrated into sessions of *Language Arts*, as well as other subjects and educational activities at secondary schools.

Emotions are a certain part of being a human being. Emotions are evoked from all situations and contexts. Emotions influence a person’s thinking, their decisions and their actions. Emotions can stimulate or stop actions. On the one hand, they help people to have more motivation, power, persistence, and creativity to overcome difficulties. On the other hand, they stop people’s actions. Similarly, Goleman (1995) states that people have two brains, two spirits, two types of intelligence (personal intelligence and emotional intelligence). These two types of intelligence supplement, direct, and manage each other. Therefore, emotional intelligence does not need to become a separate subject, but must be a vital part in all educational activities at schools. It needs to be integrated into other subjects and educational activities, especially *Language Arts*, for the sake of its ideology and aesthetic.

Teachers of Literature need to be trained and assessed of their emotional intelligence.

It can easily be seen that along with the power of literature, teachers’ ideology, emotions, and personalities have considerable impact on developing students’ ideology and emotions. One French writer once stated that “if you want to make me cry, you must cry first”. In order for students to be moved by literature, teachers must have an open and sensitive soul. Similarly, to develop students’ emotional intelligence, teachers of *Language Arts* must have a thorough understanding of EI, an ability of EI and an ability of evaluating EI. In this regards, teachers must be trained about EI. EI must be a compulsory part in the curriculum of teacher training.

Conclusion

The establishment of the science of emotional intelligence has opened up new horizons to the study of human’s internal abilities. EI has also contributed its role in promoting a new approach of teaching literature at secondary schools. Empirical data of EI’s role possibly removes doubt on the role of literature at schools. Moreover, theoretically-based and realistically-based issues relating to the role, objectives, and meaning of teaching literature at schools have been revealed. In order to exploit the endless potential of literature in developing students’ personalities and identities, developing their EI must be considered as a specific objective, a vital standard output, and an indispensable content in sessions of reading literature and studying literature at secondary schools.

Elements of EI need to be closely and reasonably integrated into Language Arts, as well as other subjects and educational activities at secondary schools. In this regards, teacher training must also be considered. Teachers at secondary schools and teachers of Literature must be trained and assessed in terms of emotional intelligence so that they can fulfill the mission of developing students' EI.

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