



IRSTI 14.07.09
Scientific article

<https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-1710-2026-154-1-239-252>

Strategies and methods of developing students' emotional intelligence in the process of learning a foreign language

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Abstract. The impact of emotional intelligence (EI) is currently being explored across diverse scientific fields, including education, psychology, and even robotics. In the information age, key competencies such as self-awareness, motivation for achievement, effective communication, and the ability to learn a foreign language have become increasingly important. Successful language learners are distinguished not only by cognitive abilities but also by motivational traits, including a positive task orientation, perseverance, a desire for success, and a tolerance for ambiguity. Emotional intelligence is therefore considered one of the most significant components of the educational process, influencing personal development, learning outcomes, and the formation of intercultural communicative competence.

The purpose of this research is to analyze scientific literature on EI, examine its impact on foreign language acquisition, and determine its role in developing students' intercultural communicative competence. Students' emotional intelligence was assessed using N. Hall's methodology, which consists of five scales and thirty items. The article also describes elicitation techniques, cognitive and socio-affective strategies, and other methodological approaches used in the development of EI within foreign language teaching.

The results demonstrate that emotional intelligence has a positive influence on students' motivation and foreign language learning, supporting the integration of EI development into modern language education.

Keywords: intelligence, emotional intelligence, intercultural communicative competence, motivation, learning strategies, techniques, scientific databases.

Received: 29.05.2025; Approved: 15.03.2026; Available online: 31.03.2026

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Introduction

Human intelligence comprises both intellectual and emotional components. Approximately 20% of life success is attributed to the intellectual quotient (IQ) (Hai et al., 2021), whereas up to 80% is linked to the emotional quotient (EQ) (Goleman, 1995). Individual differences in self-awareness and empathy substantially influence daily functioning, mental flexibility, and the learning process (Dae & Bo, 2021). Interpersonal communication is a key factor in developing intercultural understanding in a globalized world (Pshenko et al., 2011). Since language is an integral part of culture, foreign language learning plays a central role in shaping personality, attitudes, and cultural values, simultaneously acting either as a barrier or as a bridge in cross-cultural communication (Miroslav & Tomislav, 2020). Intercultural communicative competence thus enables learners to understand divergent perspectives and engage effectively in social relations across cultures.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been shown to contribute to problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, and effective functioning in international contexts (Andrzej et al., 2020). Empathy, as a component of EI, also helps reduce prejudice and blind trust (Arti et al., 2021). In our research, EI and foreign language learning are conceptualized as complementary elements that jointly contribute to the development of intercultural competence. While IQ is traditionally associated with academic performance, EI is increasingly recognized as essential for meaningful communication, particularly in multilingual and multicultural environments. Language learning, which involves emotional challenges such as anxiety or frustration, requires learners to regulate emotions, maintain persistence, and develop interpersonal sensitivity. Therefore, promoting EI in foreign language education is crucial for academic resilience and intercultural sensitivity.

The research problem arises from the insufficient integration of EI into foreign language teaching methodologies, which results in reduced student motivation and underdeveloped communicative and intercultural skills. This issue is especially evident in sports academies, where emotional resilience and teamwork are essential for student success. Hence, the study addresses the gap between cognitively oriented teaching approaches and the emotional demands of multicultural communication.

This study aims to examine the role of emotional intelligence in the foreign language classroom and to determine its significance in the development of students' intercultural communicative competence.

Research Questions

- 1) How does emotional intelligence manifest in foreign language classrooms among sports academy students?
- 2) To what extent does emotional intelligence influence students' motivation and engagement in language learning?
- 3) How does the development of emotional intelligence contribute to students' intercultural communicative competence?
- 4) Which components of emotional intelligence (e.g., self-motivation, empathy, emotion management) are most sensitive to pedagogical interventions?

Hypothesis

The implementation of targeted activities for emotional intelligence (EI) development—such as emotional diaries, role-playing exercises, and socio-affective strategies—within foreign language classes will result in statistically significant improvements in students' EI levels (particularly self-motivation and empathy) and enhance their language proficiency

and intercultural communicative competence, with $p < 0.05$ for key differences between experimental and control groups.

Scientific Novelty

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of emotional intelligence development into foreign language learning, specifically within a sports academy context, an area that has been insufficiently studied. Unlike prior research focusing on general education, this study applies targeted EI interventions (emotional diaries, cooperative games, role-plays) to first-year sports students, demonstrating measurable improvements in emotion management and empathy ($p < 0.05$). This approach bridges pedagogy, sports psychology, and intercultural competence, providing new empirical insights into how EI can enhance both language acquisition and intercultural communication in specialized educational environments.

Literature Review

In the past five years, emotional intelligence (EI) has been extensively researched across multiple scientific fields. For instance, the JSTOR database includes approximately 2800 articles in ten different languages, 300 of which relate to education, while ScienceDirect contains approximately 23 000 articles in four languages, about 5500 of which are in the social sciences.

The concept of intelligence has been considered since antiquity. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle examined the nature of human intellect, while psychologists, including L.S. Vygotsky, P.B. Gannushkin, and J. Piaget, investigated its development and role in human behavior (Bryazgalov, 2004). Intelligence is commonly defined as the capacity to perform complex tasks on a psychological basis, influencing both personal development and societal functioning. The term derives from the Latin word for mind or consciousness and has evolved to encompass different types of intelligence, including social, emotional, and cultural intelligence (Joanna, 2020). These forms of intelligence are closely linked to interpersonal relationships and social adaptation.

Emotional intelligence gained prominence in scientific discourse following the work of D. Goleman, J. Mayer, P. Salovey, C. Caruso, and Sitarios. They define emotion as an organized mental response to events, encompassing physiological, experiential, and cognitive components, whereas Sternberg conceptualized intelligence as the ability to select, form, and adapt to specific environments relevant to human life. The term “emotional intelligence” first appeared in 1966 (Jennifer, 2008) and has been further refined since the 1990s. According to F. Moradiha, EI is a form of emotional information processing that enables individuals to accurately assess their own and others’ emotions, communicate them effectively, and adapt flexibly to emotional contexts.

Research has explored the role of EI in various domains, including education (Aye Rizvandi et al., 2020), online learning readiness (Ahmed M. Alenezi, 2020), healthcare and business (Joanna, 2020), sports achievement (Miroslav et al., 2020), adolescent development (Maite, 2020), robotics (Faruk & Stanislav, 2024), and the prevention of bullying or cyberbullying. D.B. Akhmetova, in her dissertation, emphasized that EI is one of the most crucial components of the educational process, alongside knowledge and pedagogical methods. While emotional intelligence alone does not guarantee success (Aye et al., 2020), it provides significant opportunities for the development of positive personal traits.

Numerous methods exist for assessing EI, including the Lucina Method (D.V.), McCrae-Costa, N. Hall, Belyaeva S.A., Salovey, Mayer, and Goleman. Each method offers distinct features

and scales. For this study, N. Hall's emotional intelligence test was selected, as it is based on Mayer and Salovey's framework and evaluates both interpersonal relationships and emotion management. One of its scales, self-motivation, was particularly relevant to this research, given the central role of motivation in language learning. According to Penny Ur, the most successful language learners are not necessarily those for whom language acquisition is easy; rather, they demonstrate positive task orientation, ego involvement, a strong desire for success, perseverance, high aspirations, and tolerance for ambiguity.

This study adapts Mayer and Salovey's framework, as operationalized in N. Hall's methodology, to the context of language education for first-year sports academy students, emphasizing self-motivation and other EI components relevant to academic and social success. While prior research links EI to sports performance (Aye et al., 2020) or online education outcomes (Ahmed, 2020), few studies examine its integration with intercultural competence (e.g., Sandra, 2016). This highlights a gap in empirical data regarding EI in specialized educational contexts such as sports academies, which the present study seeks to address through an experimental design.

Materials and methods

The study involved first-year students from the Academy of Sports and Tourism, aged 18–19 years, including both male and female participants, with a slightly higher proportion of males. At the beginning of the academic year, students were divided into two groups of thirty participants each, based on their initial foreign language proficiency (elementary level). Group assignment was randomized while accounting for initial language skills. The research context also considered students' adaptation to university life in a sports academy, where teamwork, discipline, and competitive motivation are essential.

Assessment of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) was measured using a paper-based questionnaire adapted from N. Hall's methodology, consisting of five scales and thirty items: self-motivation (free regulation of mood), empathy, emotional awareness, management (sensitivity/indifference), and recognition of others' emotions. Responses were scored as follows: completely disagree = -3, mostly disagree = -2, partly disagree = -1, partly agree = +1, mostly agree = +2, fully agree = +3.

Partial EI levels were classified according to subscale scores:

- 1) High level: 14 and above
- 2) Medium level: 8–13
- 3) Low level: 7 and below

Overall EI levels were determined using total scores:

- High EI: ≥ 70
- Average EI: 40–69
- Low EI: ≤ 39

The reliability of the questionnaire for this sample was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding $\alpha = 0.82$ overall, with subscale alphas as follows: emotional awareness = 0.78, managing emotions = 0.75, self-motivation = 0.85, empathy = 0.81, managing others' emotions = 0.79.

Intervention Program

A structured program aimed at developing EI within foreign language learning was implemented over eight months (September–April), including at least 25 targeted sessions integrated into the standard curriculum. The program consisted of three modules:

1) Development of Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation. Activities: keeping an emotional language diary, reflective tasks after each lesson, self-encouragement techniques, anxiety reduction strategies (musical pauses, breathing exercises)

- Format: individual
- Frequency: once a week

2) Formation of Empathy and Communication Skills. Activities: role-play exercises, discussions of ethical dilemmas, perspective-taking tasks, pair and small-group work

- Format: group
- Frequency: every two weeks

3) Socio-Emotional Strategies in Language Learning. Activities: cooperative games (e.g., “What’s My Line?”, “Grab Realia”, “Blockbusters”), problem-solving tasks, debates in a foreign language, discussions on cultural differences.

- Format: mixed (individual and group)
- Frequency: 1–2 times per month

Control of External Factors

To account for external influences (e.g., anxiety, motivation, social environment), pre- and post-test surveys measured baseline anxiety (adapted State-Trait Anxiety Inventory) and motivation (Academic Motivation Scale). Groups were statistically matched on these variables ($p > 0.05$). Weekly logs tracked environmental factors; however, full isolation from external influences was not possible. Limitations related to these factors are discussed below.

Results

The study’s pre-test results indicated no significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Both groups exhibited a low level of emotional intelligence (EI) in 36.6% of participants. The medium level was observed in 40% of the experimental group and 36.6% of the control group, while the high level was 23.3% and 26.6%, respectively (Figure 1). When examining the five EI scales, the “managing emotions” scale showed the lowest scores (53.3% of students), whereas self-motivation scores were higher (43.3%), and empathy was at an average level.

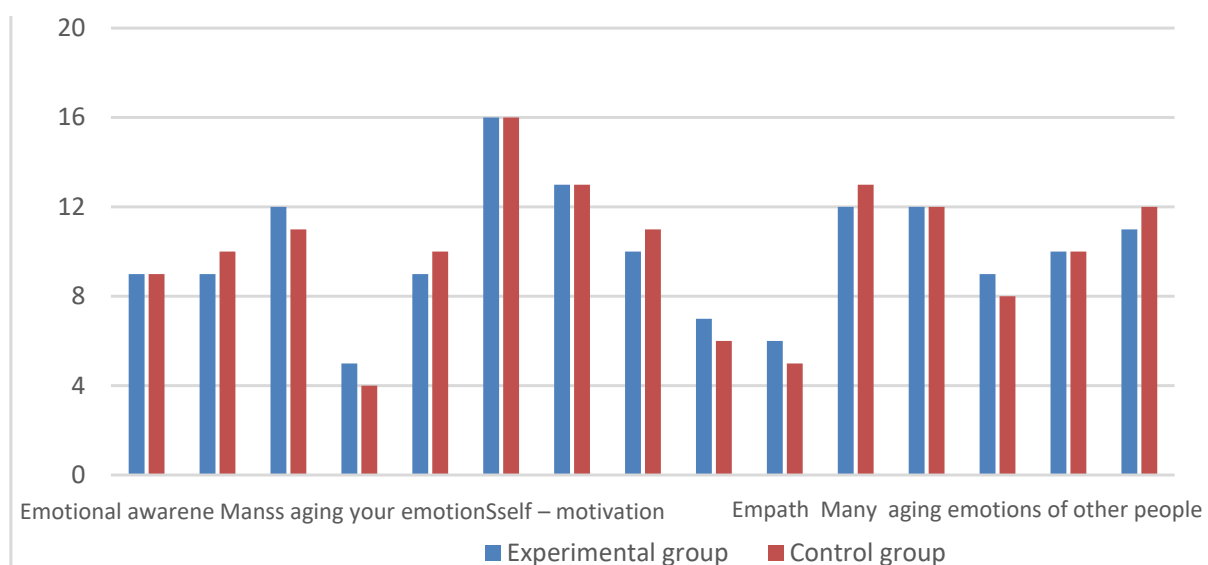


Figure 1. Pre-test results of EI

During the academic year, students participated in a structured program aimed at developing EI alongside foreign language instruction. Formative assessments were conducted in each lesson, and at the end of the term, students completed vocabulary and grammar tests and four-skills tests (pronunciation, writing, listening, and reading). Elicitation techniques proposed by Penny Ur (questions and answers, true/false, multiple choice, gap-filling, matching, dictation, cloze, transformations, translation, essays, and monologues) were used in formative tasks.

Students reflected on motivational aspects of learning, tracked their progress, and engaged in self-assessment. Games and cooperative activities—such as What’s My Line?, Grab Realia, Blockbusters, and Tennis Elbow Foot—were integrated to enhance memory, vocabulary retention, and self-confidence. Specific activities, such as How Special Am I?, encouraged students to describe themselves using adjectives, reflect on personal strengths, and explore shared qualities with peers. Additionally, learning strategies included self-monitoring, cognitive strategies (note-taking, deduction, imagery, contextualization, elaboration, inferencing), socio-affective strategies (cooperation, clarification questions), and affective strategies (anxiety reduction with music, self-reward, emotional checklists, language diaries). Exercises for emotional flexibility emphasized process-oriented thinking, learning from mistakes, and gradual improvement.

Post-Test Results

Post-test results revealed differences between the experimental and control groups (Table 1). In the experimental group, low EI scores decreased to 26.6%, medium scores increased to 46.6%, and high scores remained at 26.6%. The control group showed a decrease in low scores to 30%, medium scores rose to 43.3%, and high scores remained at 26.6%. Compared with pre-test results, the experimental group showed a 10% decrease in low-level EI, a 6.6% increase in medium-level, and a 3.3% increase in high-level EI. In the control group, low-level scores decreased by 6.6%, medium-level scores increased by 3.3%, and high-level scores remained unchanged.

Table 1. Post -test results of Emotional intelligence

Scales	Level	Experimental group		Control group	
		Number of SS	%	Number of SS	%
Emotional awareness	High	10	33.3	10	33.3
	Medium	11	36.6	11	36.6
	Low	9	30	9	30
Managing your emotions	High	7	23.3	4	13.3
	Medium	12	40	13	43.3
	Low	11	36.6	13	43.3
Self - motivation	High	13	43.3	13	43.3
	Medium	11	36.6	11	36.6
	Low	6	20	6	20
Empathy	High	6	20	5	16.6
	Medium	14	46.6	13	43.3
	Low	10	33.3	12	40
Managing the emotions of other people	High	10	33.3	8	26.6
	Medium	12	40	10	33.3
	Low	8	26.6	12	40

Analysis of individual scales indicated that self-motivation demonstrated the greatest improvement in the experimental group (43.3% high), followed by empathy and managing others' emotions. The "managing emotions" scale showed smaller but statistically significant improvements ($p = 0.032$). Statistical analysis (Student's t-test) revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the scales of emotion management ($p = 0.032$) and empathy ($p = 0.041$). Other scales showed positive trends but were not statistically significant: self-motivation ($p = 0.058$), emotional awareness ($p = 0.074$), and managing others' emotions ($p = 0.061$). Sample size was $n = 30$ per group; 95% confidence intervals were calculated, and power analysis confirmed adequacy.

Impact on Language Proficiency

Pre-test mean speaking scores were 45/100 (elementary level). Post-test results showed improvements: the experimental group scored 62/100 (elementary+ to pre-intermediate, $p = 0.028$), while the control group scored 55/100 ($p = 0.12$). Vocabulary and grammar knowledge increased by 15% in the experimental group ($p < 0.05$) and 8% in the control group. These findings indicate that EI development positively affected language competence, as emotionally intelligent students were better able to manage challenges and maintain motivation.

Additional Observations

Students with initially lower empathy and emotion management scores demonstrated the greatest improvements, indicating that EI can be intentionally cultivated through pedagogical strategies. Students also developed emotional literacy, including the ability to identify feelings, recognize emotional triggers, and respond constructively to peers. Engagement and participation increased: students asked more questions, assisted peers, and approached tasks with reduced fear of failure. Activities involving group work, storytelling, debates, and role-playing were particularly effective in fostering empathy, stress management, and intercultural skills.

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide empirical support for the hypothesis that emotional intelligence can be intentionally developed through pedagogical intervention and that such development contributes to improvements in language learning. The pre-test data revealed that students in both groups began the academic year with generally low levels of emotional intelligence, particularly in the area of emotion management. This is consistent with previous research indicating that young adults, especially those entering demanding environments such as sports academies, often struggle with emotional regulation and socio-emotional awareness (Aye Rizvandi et al., 2020; Moradiha, 2019). The low initial scores also highlight the necessity of addressing emotional skills as part of holistic education.

The post-test results demonstrated meaningful improvements in the experimental group, especially in self-motivation, empathy, and management of others' emotions. Self-motivation showed the strongest growth, which is in line with theories of language learning that emphasize the central role of motivation in sustaining effort and achieving communicative competence (Ur, 1996). These results align with Thao et al. (2023), who emphasized the implications of emotional intelligence for effective teaching practices in language learning, and Zhang (2023), who explored its positive effects on foreign language speaking proficiency in university contexts,

reporting similar gains in motivation and communicative skills. Increased self-motivation likely enabled students to engage more persistently in language tasks, thereby indirectly supporting gains in speaking proficiency, vocabulary, and grammar.

The statistically significant improvements in empathy and emotion management confirm that these components of EI are particularly sensitive to structured experiential activities such as role-play, perspective-taking, and cooperative games. These results align with studies showing that empathy can be trained through social interaction and reflective practice (Sandra, 2016). Moreover, students' improved capacity to recognize and regulate both their own and others' emotions contributes to a more supportive classroom climate, which has been shown to enhance willingness to communicate and reduce foreign language anxiety.

Although improvements were observed across all EI scales, not all reached statistical significance. This may be explained by the relatively short duration of the intervention, individual differences in personality, and external social influences that cannot be fully controlled in natural educational settings. The positive but non-significant trends nevertheless suggest that larger samples or longer interventions could yield stronger effects, as suggested in similar experimental research (Ahmed, 2020).

The observed gains in language proficiency strengthen the argument that emotional and cognitive developments are interdependent. Students who demonstrated greater progress in EI also showed better performance in speaking and linguistic accuracy. This supports the view that emotionally intelligent learners are more capable of dealing with communication challenges, managing anxiety, and maintaining engagement, all of which are critical for successful foreign language acquisition. These findings extend existing research by showing that EI development can benefit learners in specialized contexts such as sports academies, where emotional pressure and performance orientation are especially pronounced, echoing insights from Thao et al. (2023) and Zhang (2023).

Additional classroom observations revealed qualitative changes in students' behaviour, including increased participation, willingness to take risks, and supportive peer interaction. Such changes are consistent with the underlying mechanisms of socio-emotional learning and provide further evidence that EI training influences not only measurable competencies but also daily classroom dynamics and social functioning.

Overall, the results suggest that integrating emotional intelligence development into foreign language instruction is both feasible and effective. This approach contributes not only to improved language proficiency but also to students' personal growth and readiness for social interaction, which are essential competencies for academic and professional success.

Conclusion

This study highlights the crucial role of emotional intelligence (EI) in foreign language learning and demonstrates its positive impact on both students' linguistic competence and personal development. The results show that learners who are able to recognize, regulate, and manage their emotions achieve more successful outcomes in academic, social, and communicative domains. Foreign language learning, in turn, supports not only communication skills but also intercultural understanding, enabling students to act as effective mediators in multicultural communication.

The findings provide empirical evidence that EI contributes significantly to motivation, engagement, and anxiety regulation in language learning, as demonstrated by statistically significant improvements in key EI components ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, EI plays an important role in the development of intercultural communicative competence through empathy, emotional regulation, and effective interpretation of interpersonal meanings. These results are consistent with research showing the relevance of EI in diverse learning environments, including online education, sports, adolescent development, and technological contexts.

Practical implications. The integration of EI training into foreign language curricula can enhance both linguistic achievements and socio-emotional growth. Teachers should be encouraged to create emotionally supportive classroom environments and to implement activities that promote reflection, empathy, and authentic communication. Developing EI helps learners acquire essential competencies such as tolerance, flexibility, and resilience, which are increasingly important in global academic and professional contexts.

Limitations and future research. The study acknowledges several limitations, including the influence of external factors such as adaptation to university life, individual psychological differences, and the relatively short duration of the intervention. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, larger samples, and advanced digital tools (e.g., online emotional diaries or AI-assisted analysis) to further investigate the development and assessment of EI in language learning.

Overall, the study demonstrates that emotional intelligence is not a peripheral skill but a central component of effective foreign language learning and intercultural communication.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the students who participated in the study and the institutions that provided support during the data collection process.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Contribution of the Authors

R.E. Mukhpulova – conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and writing – original draft preparation.

L.O. Sarsenbayeva – supervision, validation, and critical revision of the manuscript.

A.S. Bazilgalamova – literature review, data interpretation, and editing.

Z.S. Rakhimova – literature review and data organization.

R.E. Mukhpulova – assistance in data collection and preparation of tables and figures.

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Шетел тілін оқыту үрдісінде студенттердің эмоционалдық интеллектілерін дамыту стратегиялары мен әдістері

Аңдатпа. Эмоциялық интеллектің (ЭИ) әсері бүгінгі таңда білім, психология және тіпті робототехника сияқты барлық ғылым салаларында зерттелуде. Ақпараттық ғасырда өзін-өзі тану, жетістікке деген мотивация, тиімді қарым-қатынас жасау және шетел тілін меңгеру ерекше мәнге ие болды. Тілді сәтті меңгеретін студенттер тек когнитивтік қабілеттерімен емес, сонымен қатар тапсырмаларға позитивті көзқарас, табандылық, жетістікке ұмтылу және белгісіздікке төзімділік сияқты мотивациялық қасиеттерімен ерекшеленеді. Эмоциялық интеллект білім беру процесінің негізгі құрамдас бөліктерінің бірі болып табылады және білім алушылардың тұлғалық дамуына, тілдік материалды меңгеру сапасына және мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілікке ықпал етеді.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – ғылыми дереккөздерді талдау, эмоционалдық интеллектінің шетел тілін меңгеруге әсерін зерттеу және оның білім алушылардың мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілігін дамытудағы рөлін анықтау. Студенттердің эмоционалдық интеллект деңгейін анықтау үшін бес шкаладан және отыз сұрақтан тұратын Н. Холл әдістемесі қолданылды. Мақалада, сондай-ақ эмоционалдық интеллектіні қалыптастыру барысында қолданылған elicitation тәсілдері, когнитивтік және әлеуметтік-аффективтік стратегиялар сипатталған.

Зерттеу нәтижелері эмоционалдық интеллектінің білім алушылардың мотивациясына және шетел тілін меңгеруінің нәтижелілігіне оң әсер ететінін көрсетеді, бұл ЭИ дамытуды тіл үйрету әдістемесіне енгізудің маңыздылығын дәлелдейді.

Түйін сөздер: интеллект, эмоционалды интеллект, мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілік, мотивация, оқыту стратегиялары, әдістері, ғылыми мәліметтер базасы

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Стратегии и методы развития эмоционального интеллекта у студентов в процессе обучения иностранному языку

Аннотация. Влияние эмоционального интеллекта (ЭИ) изучается во всех научных областях, включая образование, психологию и даже робототехнику. В информационную эпоху особую значимость приобретают такие компетенции, как осознанность, мотивация к достижению успеха, умение эффективно общаться и способность к изучению иностранного языка. Успешные изучающие иностранный язык отличаются не только когнитивными способностями, но и мотивационными качествами, такими как позитивное отношение к заданиям, настойчивость, стремление к успеху и терпимость к неопределённости. Эмоциональный интеллект является одной из ключевых составляющих образовательного процесса и оказывает влияние на личностное развитие, качество усвоения языкового материала и формирование межкультурной коммуникативной компетентности.

Цель исследования — анализ научных источников, изучение влияния эмоционального интеллекта на овладение иностранным языком и определение его роли в развитии межкультурной коммуникативной компетентности учащихся. Для оценки уровня эмоционального интеллекта была использована методика Н. Холла, включающая пять шкал и тридцать вопросов. В статье также описаны приёмы elicitation, когнитивные и социо-аффективные стратегии, применяемые в процессе формирования эмоционального интеллекта.

Результаты исследования показывают положительное влияние эмоционального интеллекта на мотивацию и успешность овладения иностранным языком, что подтверждает необходимость интеграции развития ЭИ в современную методику преподавания языков.

Ключевые слова: интеллект, эмоциональный интеллект, межкультурная коммуникативная компетентность, мотивация, стратегии обучения, методы, научные базы данных.

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