Research Article

Intervention in teaching as a means for developing emotional intelligence and positive thinking in 1st-year students in teacher education programmes

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ABSTRACT

Many studies show that students' emotional instability affects the quality of knowledge acquisition, confirming the thesis of the unity between affect and intellect. The current research is related to the improvement of social emotional competence of prospective teachers, the development of which begins in the period of training. This is why special intervention measures have been designed to increase the level of emotional intelligence and enhance positive thinking in 1st-year teacher education programme students. It is hence important to study the possibilities for the development of EI and positive thinking in 1st-year teacher education programme students for their future professional success. Nowadays, it is not just academic knowledge in the professional field that is important for professional activity, but also the ability to recognize and control emotions and to perceive the social environment in a positive way. The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ- i) and Diener Positive Thinking Scale were used. An intervention programme was designed for the development of EI and positive thinking. To check the effectiveness of intervention, a survey was conducted before and after the implementation of the programme. It was found that specially designed intervention promotes the improvement of EI and positive thinking in the university education environment. The gaps in the development of the social and emotional, and the communicative competence necessary for successful acquisition of teacher training programmes have been remedied in 1st-year students.

Keywords: emotional intelligence (EI); first-year students; intervention; positive thinking; social and emotional competence; teacher education programme

1. Introduction

The idea of the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) and its significant role arises from social intelligence (SI) research. SI is a separate aspect of intelligence, which is different from an individual's logical abilities but has an important role for succeeding in different spheres of life. SI is described as the ability to perceive one's own and others' internal states, motives, and behaviour and to act appropriately [48, 2].

SI and EI have been found to be multidimensional constructs with noticeable similarities. However, they also have certain differences. EI consists of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, but SI is only formed by

the interpersonal factor [34]. The EI level is related to the understanding of one's own as well as others' positive and negative feelings.

Oftentimes adolescents are not aware of their own positive and negative feelings, nor the feelings of other people. An important component of EI is the ability to articulate one's emotions, not to give in to panic, to reject negative emotions by being aware of their source, and to continue acting calm. The EI level testifies to the ability to communicate with others, to listen actively, to work in a team. It affects self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills development. EI not only affects self-efficacy directly, but also has an indirect effect on self-efficacy through coping styles [47].

Emotions also have an important role in the learning process. Emotions cannot be separated from learning because the connection of the mind and emotions is what forms the primary learning motivation [37]. Which is why it is important to develop EI from childhood and to improve it in the teenage years.

Emotions are related to logical thinking and life satisfaction. It has been discovered that positive and negative emotions are just opposites and elimination of negative emotional states does not promote the occurrence of positive states [15]. A person with EI is able to accept difficulties and react to them in a constructive manner [10].

Bar-On [5, 6] views EI as an integral part of positive psychology and positive thinking in particular. Thus, such traits as self-regard and self-acceptance based on precise self-awareness, and the ability to understand the feelings of others in social interactions are related to the positive thinking ability.

Positive thinking is considered to be a cognitive process which helps people solve problems more effectively and serves as a useful strategy for overcoming difficulties [12] and creating hopeful images of the future [11]. Positive thinking is a generally analytical and productive evaluation of past, present, and future experience. Positive thinking is also related to self-acceptance and the acceptance of one's life, an optimistic view on the future. Each of these qualities is related to such aspects of an individual's functioning as health, achievements, and relationships [20] because the more positive view a person has on life, the higher their self-esteem and level of optimism [14].

It is believed that thinking can be trained, creating a new habit. One of the primary recommendations for people seeking happiness and joy is to develop positive thinking and reduce negative thinking. Positive or negative thinking can affect a person's sense of wellbeing, emotional state, and self-control [30]. Positive thinking is related to the person's emotional state – people demonstrate different states of mind in different situations [21].

Young people undergo cognitive, social, and emotional changes [39]. This is why it is important to focus on the development of positive thinking to ensure that they are happy, satisfied with life and able to solve their personal problems. Young people need to be able to form relationships with others and see a long-term life goal when planning their professional career [35, 3].

It is important to be able to manage one's behaviour and actions independently, to control oneself, take responsibility for the results of one's actions, to solve various issues and form one's own independent opinion of others. If EI is not sufficiently developed, this can exacerbate different behavioural problems, which can also manifest later in life [27]. For example, Batool and Khalid [9] show the adaptivity value of emotional intelligence in maintaining and strengthening an individual's mental health, i.e. people with low emotional intelligence are prone to depression. Whereas Sánchez-López et al. [42] have discovered that people with lower emotional intelligence were more likely to abuse alcohol and gamble. It can be concluded that developed EI stabilises personal and professional identity and serves as a kind of guarantee for the feeling of well-being.

Today, the opinion that well-developed EI testifies to a specialist's social and emotional competence has consolidated in the educational system [43]. Carolyn Saarni [41] states that social and emotional competence is not innate but develops as a result of interaction with other people, especially family members and peers. The author defines social and emotional competence as the functional capacity wherein a human can reach their goals after an emotion-eliciting encounter. Hence, emotions are defined as a component of self-efficacy, and the use of emotions means improving a set of skills which lead to the development of social and emotional competence. Furthermore, self-efficacy is important in the management of academic burnout, and optimal self-esteem can support students and mitigate feelings of inadequacy in various academic tasks [32].

Thus, we have assumed that social and emotional competence is one of the main signs of a prospective teacher's professionalism. As Bachelor students gain qualification, knowledge, and skills, in their preparation for future professional life, it would be beneficial to make sure that they are also equipped with knowledge and skills pertaining to emotional functioning.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research instruments and sampling

The participants of the study were 83 1st-year teacher education programme students. No specialisation was selected as students take general courses in their first year. Bar-On [7] Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) was used – the Latvian language version adapted by Roze [40]. The inventory consists of 133 statements divided into five composite (major) scales and 15 subscales: Intrapersonal scale with five subscales – Emotional Self-awareness, Assertiveness, Self-regard, Self-actualisation, Independence; Interpersonal scale with three subscales – Empathy, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Responsibility; Stress Management with two subscales – Stress Tolerance and Impulse Control; Adaptability with three subscales – Problem Solving, Reality Testing, and Flexibility; General Mood with two subscales – Happiness and Optimism. The EQ-i statements are presented in the form of short sentences and use a 5-point response scale with a textual response format ranging from "very seldom or not true of me" (1) to "very often true of me or true of me" (5). Cronbach's Alpha criterion was applied to determine the validity of the results of the EI survey. In this sample, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranges from $\alpha = .690$ to $.920$, which testifies to good internal consistency of the scale.

From the respondents surveyed, 18 students were selected with relatively low EI scores. These participants were offered to complete Diener's Positive Thinking Scale (PTS) [19] individually. The PTS consists of 22 statements with possible responses "yes" or "no". When processing the results, "1" is given for every "yes" response to each of 11 positive statements marked by (P) and for every "no" response to 11 negative statements (N). Cronbach's Alpha was found for the positive statement scale ($\alpha = .73$) and for the negative statement scale ($\alpha = .68$). Both surveys were conducted online on the Google Docs platform.

2.2 Data analysis

The statistical analysis of the data was performed using the software "SPSS Statistics 22". To optimise the work on the improvement and development of EI and positive thinking, 18 students were divided into two intervention groups, 9 members in each group. Participation in intervention groups was voluntary.

2.3 Intervention programme description

Programme aim: Promote EI and improve positive thinking scores in 19- to 20-year-old students. Programme implementation: two groups of participants, with 9 people in each group. The sessions lasting 40-50 minutes took place once a week for 3 months. The total number of sessions was not fixed and depended on the successful completion of separate stages of the programme by the students. Hypothetically, there could have been more than twelve sessions. Students demonstrated different understanding and insightful

performance of the tasks offered. Some tasks were used in several sessions, however, with different materials. In each session, previously introduced tasks were practiced and new tasks were offered. If there were any difficulties performing a task, similar tasks were offered after a short period of time. After solving a similar task, a second attempt to tackle the originally proposed task was offered. It should be noted that the perception of difficulty of the tasks differed. Where one group managed a task without a problem, the other group struggled with the same task. From session to session, the students understood that there may be different paths towards the correct answer and that solutions are often not alike. Finally, the participants showed relative synchrony, with 12 sessions in each group.

Materials and room setup required for the implementation of the programme: The sessions were organised both remotely in the digital environment as well as in person. It is important to stress that group sessions require a bright and spatial room to perform the activities planned for work in a group as well as individually. The programme participants were issued all the necessary learning materials. Group work was based on personal approach, i.e. we did not try to teach the students anything against their will. Positive contact among the participants was ensured and reflection was promoted in the group [23].

Programme activity implementation principles:

- Ensuring a positive environment – a positive and empathetic attitude, support, a friendly environment, and the feeling of security;
- Free choice – an opportunity to solve tasks where no single right solution exists is provided;
- Participation in activity – in the sessions, each group member develops his or her ability to think positively and to form a positive attitude;
- Feedback – an opportunity to freely share one's experience, thoughts, and feelings after the activities has to be provided;
- Considering personality traits – accepting the diversity of the participants and taking their interests into account;
- Observing rules – following the conditions for performing the tasks;
- Observing time – the leader of the session tells the participants about the time limits for the activities;
- Confidentiality – personal information, tasks performed, and the results obtained are only used within the particular session.

The number of group participants remains the same throughout the programme. The programme designed consists of several stages: conversations before the beginning of work, which need to be conducted repeatedly, divided into several parts according to meaning; tasks designed for the development of cognitive operations and emotional management skills, which allow improving the ability of students to recognise their emotions and positive behaviour features, to improve self-esteem, develop behavioural self-regulation skills and positive thinking.

The sessions were structured so as to ensure that the participants are active subjects in the intervention process. We believe that these are the preconditions for developing positive thinking and the ability to understand and manage one's emotions. Unfortunately, life is not always filled with happiness and only minor misfortunes – it can also cause real suffering, which is why it is very important to teach students to deal with failure and to overcome difficulties. In such cases, we offered to make a list of problems. The students were encouraged to recall all the problems they were having at the moment. Then they had to reframe all the problems into goals, taking care not to use 'negative language', i.e. the particle 'not' and words like 'stop'. At the end of the session, the students were asked to observe the change in their emotional state.

We based our intervention on the students' strengths, did not highlight mistakes, and refrained from negative consequences. At the beginning of the work, we used tasks which were interesting by themselves and did not pose any significant difficulty. Gradually the difficulty of the tasks was increased, decreasing the chances of successful completion, which is why it was extremely important to prevent the students from losing interest for the sessions.

It is important to stress that group sessions served as a means of emotional support for any achievement of the students to allow them to experience success as happiness [45]. The fact that university education is different from secondary school education allows believing that intervention is significantly more beneficial for 1st-year students than the students in upper years of education because first-year students need time for social and psychological adaptation. All the usual groupwork methods are suitable for students – applied games are required for supporting interest towards the sessions.

There is specific dynamics concerning interest towards different types of games: young people are interested in exciting, relaxing, as well as intellectual games, which was taken into account when designing the session strategy [31]. Groupwork was also aimed at psychological support: it was unacceptable to put a student on the spot; effort and perseverance had to be rewarded, even if the result was far from the goal. If negative self-perception was demonstrated, we used the positive self-talk approach [29].

3. Results and analysis

3.1 Description of the results prior to the intervention programme

The results were summarised, processed, and analysed to establish the students' EI levels and to determine which EI aspects are developed better and which are developed less. Overall, the results show that the scores for all five major scales are similar in the students, with only minimum differences (see **Figure 1**). The data summary shows that the participants' scores correspond to an average adequate level.
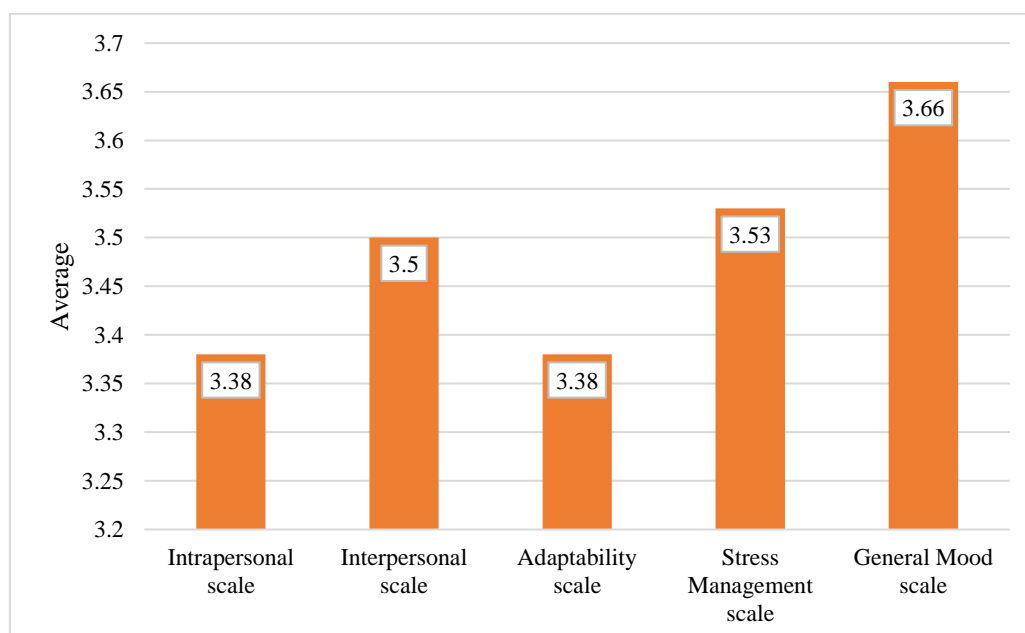
Figure 1. Average score distribution histogram for five major EI scales (83 students)

The analysis of EI scales shows the highest scores for the General Mood (3.66). High results are also observed for the Stress Management scale (3.53) and the Interpersonal scale (3.50). This testifies to the ability to maintain hope and see life in a positive light despite any difficulties, to be generally satisfied with one's life

[4]. The students surveyed are also characterised by the ability to control their actions in different situations and to act responsibly. Lower scores were obtained for the Intrapersonal scale (3.38) and for the Adaptability scale (3.38). Whereas detailed results for 15 subscales are reflected in **Figure 2**.
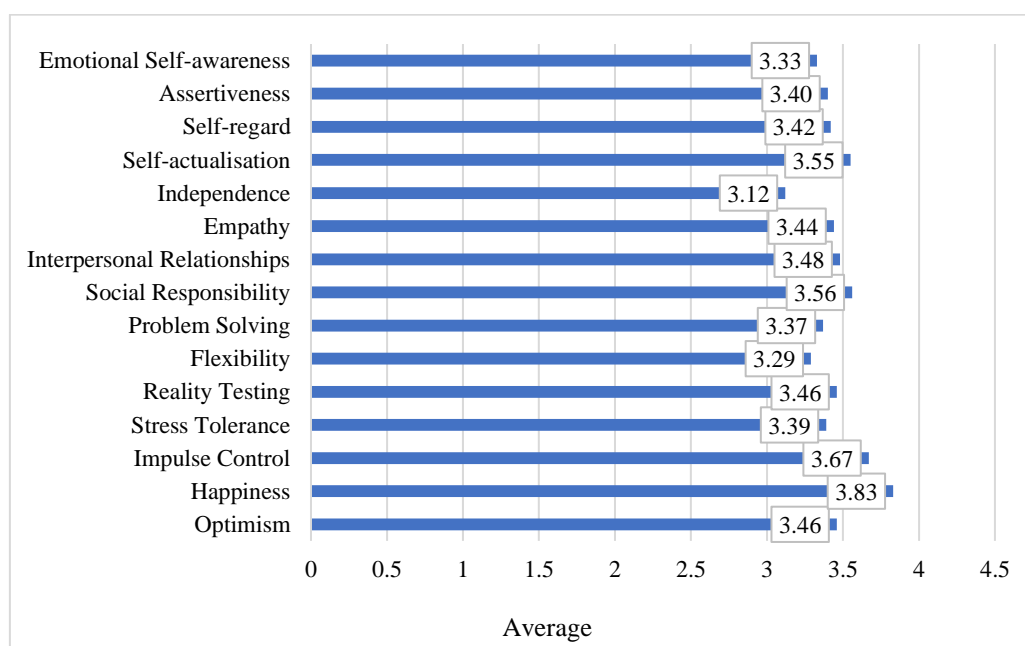

Figure 2. Average score distribution histogram for EI subscales (83 students).

From the summary of the results on the 15 subscales forming EI, it was found that the highest scores were obtained for the General Mood scale, which includes such subscales as Happiness (3.83) and Optimism (3.46), and for the Stress Management scale, which includes the Stress Tolerance (3.39) and Impulse Control (3.67) subscales. The participants obtained lower scores for the Adaptability scale, which includes the Problem Solving (3.37), Flexibility 3.29), and Reality Testing (3.46) subscales, and for the Intrapersonal scale, which includes such subscales as Emotional Self-awareness (3.33), Assertiveness (3.40), Self-regard (3.42), Self-actualisation (3.55), and Independence (3.12), the latter being a very low score. The results obtained show that students have difficulty adapting to change and solving different problems. They also have difficulty understanding and noticing their own emotions and lack the ability to defend their own opinions and to accept themselves the way they are. There are also problems with realising their own potential and setting goals for the future.

The data obtained show that EI of students needs to be improved because, according to the results, some students have extremely low scores. The scores on the Interpersonal scale, which includes such subscales as Empathy (3.44), Interpersonal Relationships (3.48), and Social Responsibility (3.56), are important. The Interpersonal scale is fundamental to the development of EI in teachers, namely the ability to understand how others feel and interact with them. This is especially important because future teachers need to be able to control their emotions in order to successfully work independently and to find understanding with others both in personal relationships and in the professional environment. It is believed that EI can be developed and improved throughout an individual's life [44].

After looking at the results obtained by the sample group (n=18) for the five major scales, it was found that only the Interpersonal scale corresponds to the average adequate level, whereas the results for the other four scales – Intrapersonal, Adaptability, General Mood, and Stress Management – are low. Three students with an extremely low EI level, three students with a very low level, five students with a low level, and seven

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students with an average level of EI continued taking part in the study and participated in intervention. The results obtained are reflected in **Figure 3**.
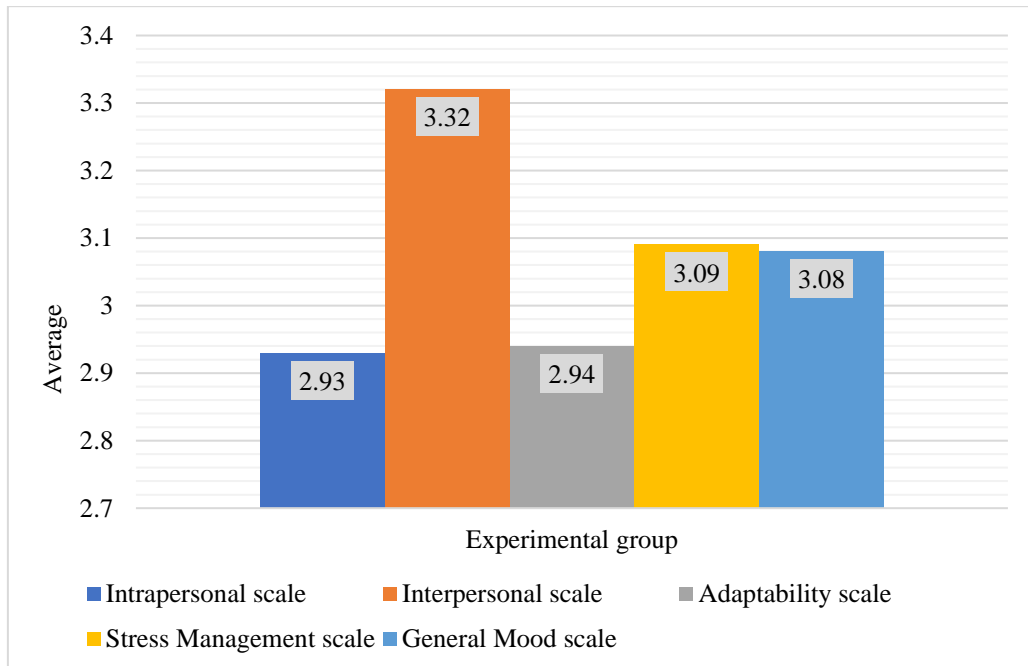
Figure 3. Average results for five major scales in the sample group before intervention (n=18).

The results show that self-control, self-guidance, emotional awareness, the ability to adapt to new life situations, general outlook and life satisfaction need to be improved. From the analysis of the results obtained by the sample group of students, it was found that the scores correspond to an average adequate level for the following subscales: Impulse Control (3.24), Social Responsibility (3.44), and Empathy (3.42). The scores for other subscales are low (**Figure 4**).
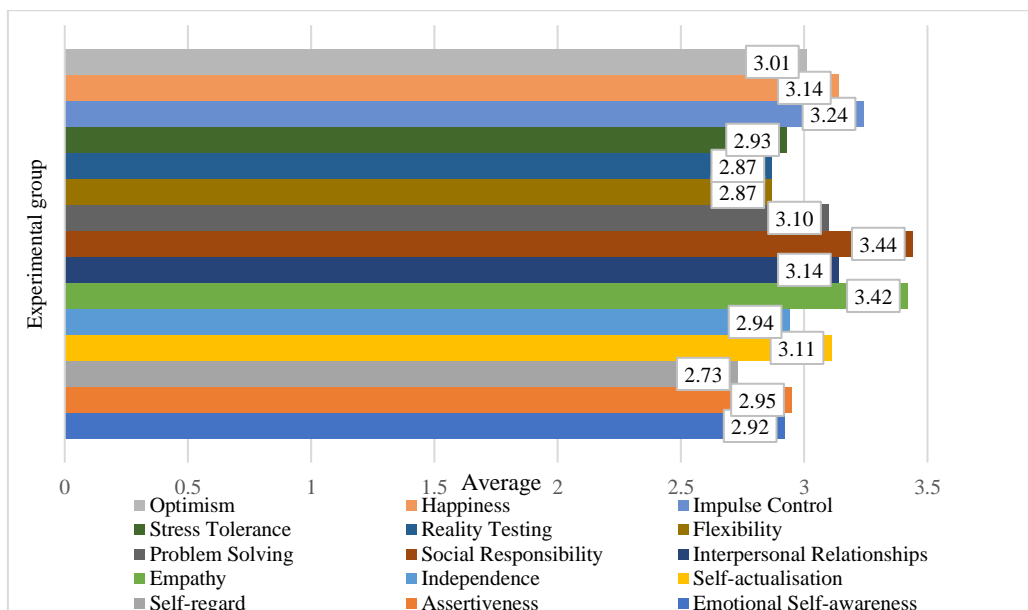

Figure 4. Average scores for the subscales in the sample group before intervention (n=18)

The lowest results are observed for such subscales as Self-regard (2.73), Flexibility (2.87), Reality Testing (2.87), and Emotional Self-awareness (2.92), Optimism (3.01), Happiness (3.14), Interpersonal Relationships

(3.14), Stress Tolerance (2.93), Problem Solving (3.10), Independence (2.94), Self-actualization (3.11), Assertiveness (2.95). This means that special attention needs to be devoted to the understanding and control of emotions by students, their ability to adapt to variable life situations, and the ability to give an objective evaluation to their own internal feelings and external reality. Emotions are related to thinking. Special characteristics of positive thinking were diagnosed using Diener's method [16].

Having analysed positive thinking in the sample group, it was found that the majority of the participants have a tendency for negative thinking, followed by the participants with neutral thinking. The minority of the participants were found to have expressly negative or expressly positive thinking, as well as positive thinking. Special attention needs to be paid to participants demonstrating extremely negative thinking and a tendency for negative thinking in order to encourage a more positive outlook on life (Figure 5).
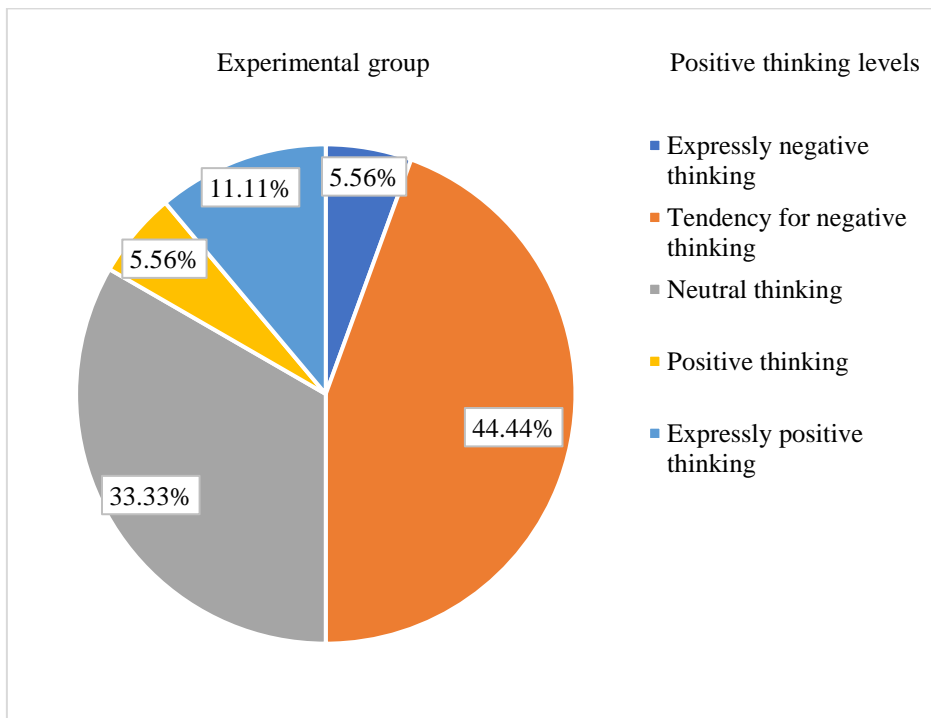
Figure 5. Distribution of scores in the sample group according to positive thinking levels before intervention (n=18).

Then intervention was performed in the groups to improve EI and positive thinking.

3.2 Description of the results after the intervention programme

To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, the results before and after the intervention measures were compared. After the evaluation of the results on five major scales in the sample of the students after intervention, it was found that the scores on the following four scales correspond to an average adequate level: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Stress Management, and General Mood (Figure 6).
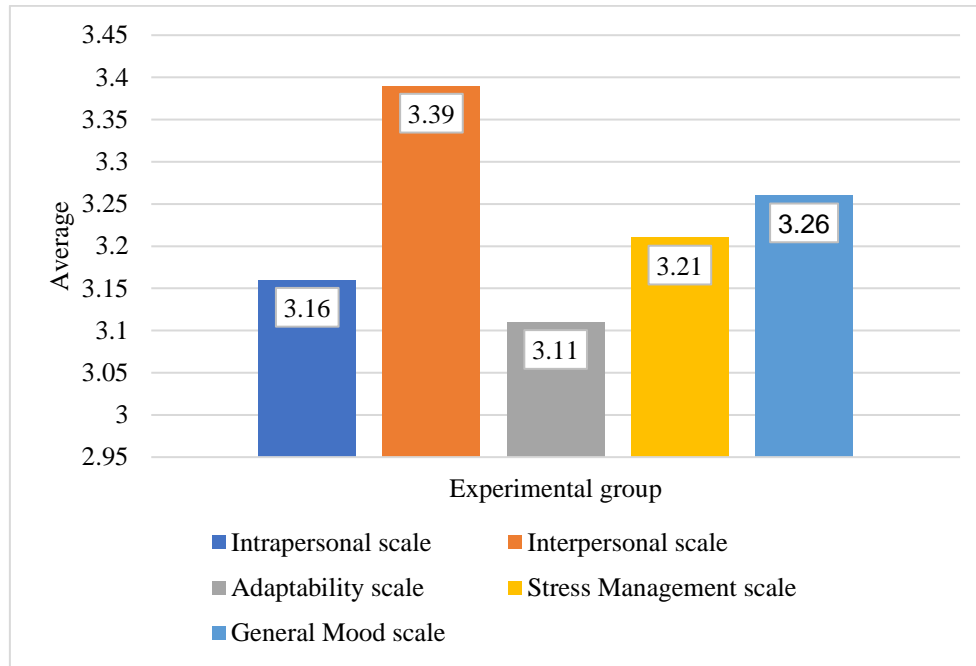
Figure 6. Average scores for five major scales in the sample group after intervention.

All five scales above show improvement since the previous measurement. Although Adaptability scores do not reach the average adequate level, the result still shows improvement. Student's t-test for dependent samples shows statistically significant differences in the sample group *before and after* intervention for the Intrapersonal scale (p=.002), Adaptability scale (p=.003), Stress Management scale (p=.050), and General Mood scale p=.003), but no statistically significant difference for the Interpersonal scale (p=.161) (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Student's t-test for dependent samples

Sample Group	Before intervention (n=18)	After intervention (n=18)	r
	Intrapersonal	Intrapersonal	.002**
	Interpersonal	Interpersonal	.161
EQ-i scales	Adaptability	Adaptability	.003**
	Stress Management	Stress Management	.050*
	General Mood	General Mood	.003**

*p<.05 **p<.01

From the analysis of the results obtained by the sample group after intervention, it was found that the scores correspond to at least an average adequate level on the Stress Management scale and Impulse Control (3.38) subscale, as well as the Interpersonal scale with three subscales: Social Responsibility (3.75), Empathy (3.94), and Interpersonal Relationships (3.13) (**Figure 7**).
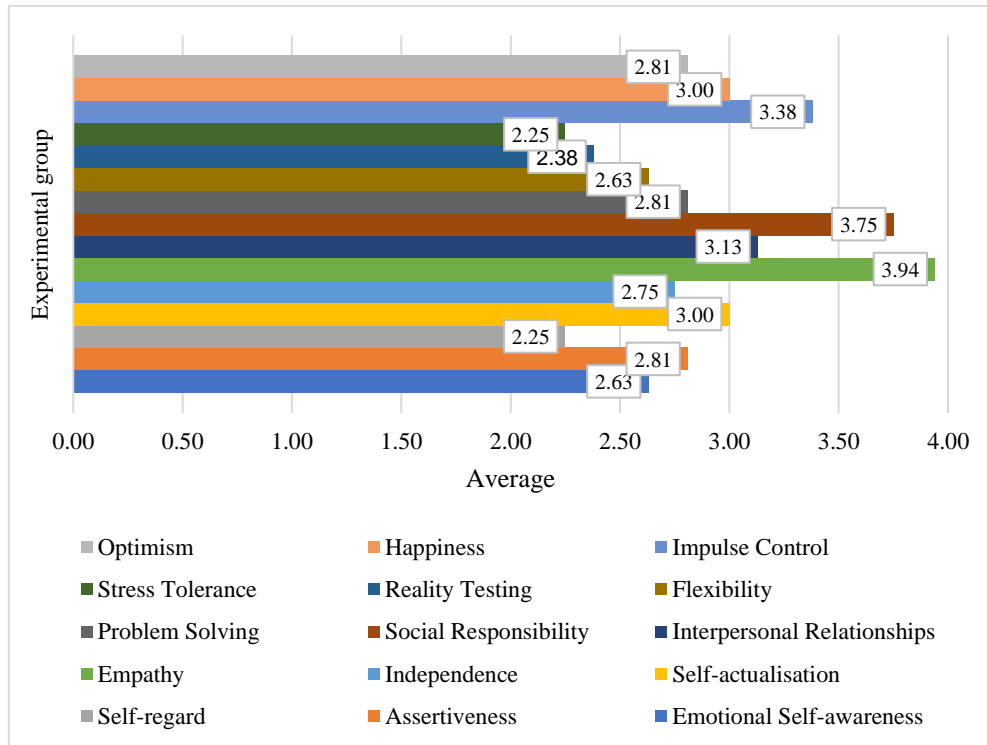
Figure 7. Average scores on the subscales in the sample group after intervention.

The results on the other subscales are still low, however the majority of the factors show improvement, for example, such subscales as Stress Tolerance (2.25), Independence (2.75), Self-regard (2.25), Happiness (3.00) and Optimism (2.81), Reality Testing (2.38), Flexibility (2.63), and Problem Solving (2.81). No improvement is observed for the Assertiveness (2.81), Emotional Self-awareness (2.63), and Self-actualisation (3.00) factors. This could mean that intervention needs to continue in order to improve all the results.

Student's t-test for dependent samples for 15 EI subscales in the group sample at the start and at the end of the study shows statistically significant differences for the following subscales: Assertiveness (r=.052), Self-regard (r=.003), Self-actualisation (r=.014), Reality Testing (r=.023), Stress Tolerance (r=.037). This means that students have improved (or strengthened) the following abilities: to express their thoughts and feelings clearly; to accept themselves with their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and limitations; to realise their potential and be satisfied with their achievements in school and personal life; to objectively compare their feelings and thinking with external reality, i.e., to see things as they really are; to cope calmly with the effects of stressors and avoid engaging negative emotions. No statistically significant difference has been found for the subscales Emotional Self-awareness (r=.106), Independence (r=.254), Empathy (r=.338), Interpersonal Relationships (r=.950), Social Responsibility (r=.965), Problem Solving (r=.443), Flexibility (r=.157), Impulse Control (r=.867), Happiness (r=.324), and Optimism (r=.806). Therefore, the abilities reflected in these subscales need to be developed (see Table 2).

Table 2. Student's t-test for dependent samples

Sample group	Before intervention (n=18)	After intervention (n=18)	r
EQ-i subscales	Emotional Self-awareness	Emotional Self-awareness	.106
	Assertiveness	Assertiveness	.052*
	Self-regard	Self-regard	.003**

Self-actualisation	Self-actualisation	.014*
Independence	Independence	.254
Empathy	Empathy	.338
Interpersonal Relationships	Interpersonal Relationships	.950
Social Responsibility	Social Responsibility	.965
Problem Solving	Problem Solving	.443
Flexibility	Flexibility	.157
Reality Testing	Reality Testing	.023**
Stress Tolerance	Stress Tolerance	.037**
Impulse Control	Impulse Control	.867
Happiness	Happiness	.324
Optimism	Optimism	.806

$*p<0.05$ $**p<0.01$

The analysis of positive thinking after intervention shows that the sample group's results can be divided into four levels (**Figure 8**).
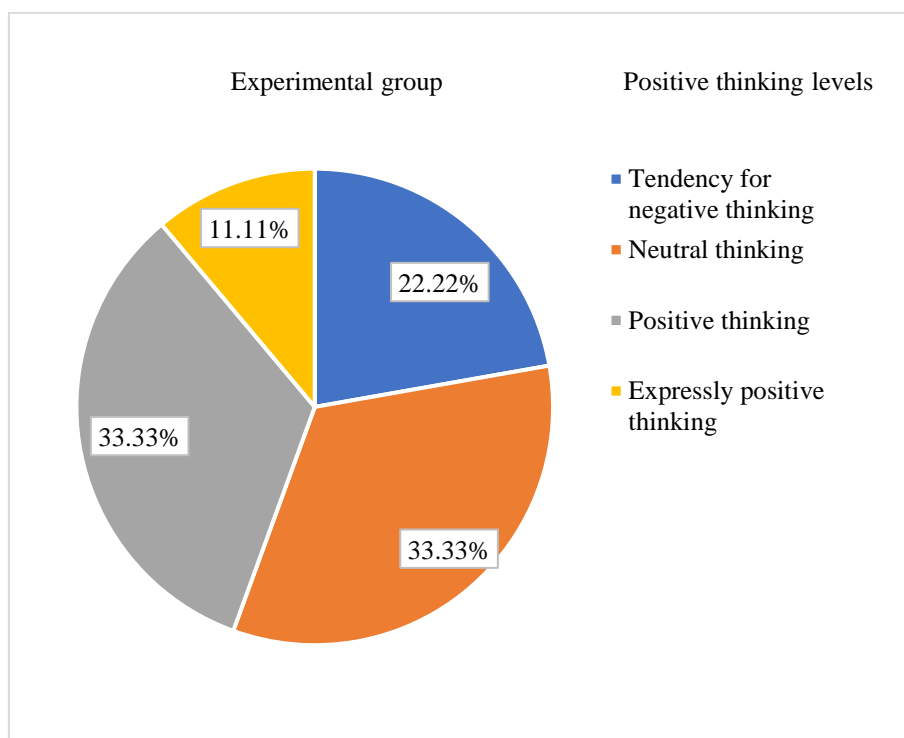
Figure 8. Result distribution according to positive thinking levels after intervention (n=18).

In comparison with the results demonstrated by the students before intervention (see Figure 5), it is noteworthy that no students in the sample group show expressly negative thinking anymore. The number of participants with positive thinking has increased, and the number of participants with a tendency to think negatively has decreased. The number of young people with neutral and expressly positive thinking has remained similar to the result before intervention. It can thus be concluded that the students' positive thinking levels have improved.

It must also be noted that statistical processing of the data obtained was performed before and after intervention in order to find any correlations between the EI scales and positive thinking levels. The correlations found are presented in **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

The results obtained allow stating that a significant positive correlation exists between all five composite (major) scales and Positive thinking: the Intrapersonal scale and Positive thinking (r=.713), Interpersonal scale and Positive thinking (r=.477), Adaptability scale and Positive thinking (r=.673), Stress Management scale and Positive thinking (r=.678), and General Mood scale and Positive thinking (r=.684) before intervention (see **Table 3**).

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients between five EQ-i scales and Positive Thinking before intervention (n=18).

EQ-i scales	Positive thinking
Intrapersonal	.713**
Interpersonal	.477**
Adaptability	.673**
Stress Management	.678**
General Mood	.684**

**p<0.01

The results obtained after intervention show that a significant correlation exists between the Intrapersonal scale and Positive thinking (r= .579), Interpersonal scale and Positive thinking (r= .360), Adaptability scale and Positive thinking (r= .622), Stress Management scale and Positive thinking (r= .643), and General Mood scale and Positive thinking (r= .570) (see **Table 4**).

Table 4. Pearson's correlation coefficients between five EQ-i scales and Positive thinking after intervention (n=18).

EQ-i scales	Positive Thinking
Intrapersonal	.579**
Interpersonal	.360**
Adaptability	.622**
Stress Management	.643**
General Mood	.570**

**p<0.01

Of course, the relatively low EI and positive thinking scores found before intervention speak to the necessity to develop and improve these characteristics. However, a significant correlation between EI and positive thinking was found before as well as after intervention. On the one hand, this means that some of the students in the sample group had some EI and positive thinking skills; on the other hand, the programme offered had no negative effect on the existing EI and positive thinking skills. Overall, the obtained results testify to the fact that the gaps in the development of the social and emotional, and the communicative competence necessary for successful acquisition of teacher training programmes have been remedied in 1st-year students. The combination of tasks aimed at developing EI and positive thinking creates prerequisites for the development of emotional stability and the ability to create a positive environment, thus counteracting the development of burnout in prospective teachers.

4. Discussion

The intervention programme was conducted with students aged 19 to 20. Nowadays this age is described as emerging adulthood – a new period in a person's lifespan between adolescence and young adulthood [4]. Young people think in concepts, which is related to discovering the regularities of the world's development. Young people are capable of abstract and conceptual perception of reality, independent thinking, and logical processing of information [8]. However, positive thinking does not appear automatically because this period of life is characterised by instability of personality and egocentrism. At this age in life, a future teacher's core interests in life are formed, which brings about the beginning of active development of their professional identity [17, 18].

Purposeful organisation of activity – an important social and cultural factor in an individual's development – has special significance. The higher education period is one of the most significant and at the same time complex stages of a person's life, and inability to control one's emotions and behaviour can lead to deviant behaviour [28]. The significant role of students' social and emotional skills in enhancing their engagement in the learning process is also emphasised [24, 43, 46]. Our experience shows that students can experience emotional blunting, which manifests as insensitivity to each another, which is why it is very important to speak about emotional awareness and control regarding both oneself and others.

A study by Asma Naser Alkhawaldeh [1] shows that in the case of high EI, the level of psychological detachment is reduced in student relationships; moreover, EI and academic success are highly important for 1st-year students. Considering that emotional problems only grow as time goes by, ignoring them can lead to emotional burnout [26]. Research results have confirmed that well-designed systemic work allows changing the level of EI and positive thinking.

Positive thinking is related to the management of emotions, optimism, and the awareness of a positive meaning of any emotion. One of the important preconditions for successful work with students is a favourable atmosphere in the sessions, respectful attitude, praise for active participation and success of each student [13, 25]. The sessions have to be multifaceted and need to complete each other – one cannot exist without another.

Nelis et al. [33] have developed a teaching intervention to be applied to a group of Bachelor students to improve EI. The measures included short readings, lectures, group discussions, and roleplay. The intervention was evaluated using combinations of character traits and abilities, and significant improvement was achieved in the perception and management of emotions. It was found that positive changes remained significant half a year later.

Whereas Lorraine Dacre Pool and Pamela Qualter [36] have designed a pedagogical intervention programme for increasing the level of emotional intelligence and emotional self-efficacy in university students. The authors show that the development of the EI element "understanding of emotions" can have crucial importance for the employability of the graduates. The results of the study also show that self-efficacy and emotional functioning in students can be increased by expanding their knowledge and understanding in this area.

The objective reality is that 1st-year students face problems related to separation from family and friends and adaptation to a new and complex learning environment [23]. This is why we were glad to find a change in the behaviour and attitude of the students who participated in our study. The students have become more open and friendly and are able to express and justify their thoughts and remain in control in non-standard situations. They have become more cheerful, with a more positive outlook on their future, which is necessary for a teacher's professional competence. Thus, we have come to the conclusion that the education process needs to include activities aimed not only at professional but also personal growth, achieving goals, understanding and control of emotions, the ability to satisfy one's everyday needs.

Social support is crucially important for those who aim to transform negative self-talk into positive thinking [29], whereas high EI can guarantee that the individual will always receive all the support required [22]. This is another example of a reinforcing link between EI and positive thinking — higher EI and resiliency can help with forming long-term relationships, whereas strong relationships can help balance emotions and decrease negative thinking habits. People with high emotional intelligence are able to establish deeper connections with others, building relationships based on trust [16]. The quality of the relationship is one more important factor which affects health aspects related to stress.

Positive thinking can be an important factor in decreasing stress in everyday life, which, in turn, can bring many health benefits [38, 45]. A study by Yan [49] shows that professional self-efficacy and job satisfaction increase if teachers use expressive and positive coping strategies. We believe that these results support the need to continue working on the development of EI and emotional competence of prospective teachers, especially during the period of methodological reforms and paradigm shifts in the education system as a whole. Given that learning EI skills can help with positive thinking tendencies, but positive thinking can decrease stress and the risk of occupational burnout, it can thus be stated that developing EI is the first step towards a long and happy life.

Development of EI and positive thinking in students is one of the difficult tasks in psychological and pedagogical practice. Thus, EI is considered a precondition for success in professional life and in relationships, and one of the main ways of solving this issue is to perform intervention.

Limitations

Cultural and ethnic context, social status, and gender differences were not taken into account, as requested by the participants of the study. There were different schedules of intervention sessions for the two parallel subgroups, but with the same number of sessions, the regularity of the scheduled meetings differed. Future research needs to consider the design of intervention programmes depending on the situational context and the type of interaction strategy between students and academic staff.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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