



# Impact of Emotional Intelligence Skills Training on Marital Adjustment Among Students of Mazandaran University

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## Abstract

**Background:** In terms of family psychological health, emotional intelligence (EQ) and marital adjustment are issues, which should not be overlooked. However, a few studies have been conducted to experiment and evaluate the impact of EQ skill-based training on couples' marital adjustment.

**Objectives:** The aim of this pilot study was to assess the effect of EQ components on marital adjustment among university students.

**Methods:** The study utilized a quasi-experimental design with married couples (N = 60) from Mazandaran University aged 22 to 29 years old. The experimental group (30 married couples) participated in a training course on emotional intelligence skills and the other 30 couples did not do so. Measures of emotional intelligence and marital adjustment were completed by the participants. Pre and post training tests, Bar-On emotional intelligence test, and Har Mohan-Singh marital adjustment questionnaire were completed by both groups. The Paired *t*-test was used in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the training course.

**Results:** Participants' data showed that the training course had an impact on EQ as well as marital adjustment. Data analysis showed that conducting the training course had significant impact on the experimental group ( $P < 0.001$ ). Analysis of the data approved that training had an impact on the students' marital adjustment in the experimental group ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusions:** Considering the significant positive relationship between EQ and marital adjustment, the EQ competencies can be utilized as a fundamental and effective component in improving and reinforcing satisfactory marital relationships. Therefore, interpersonal relationship and marital relationship between each couple can be improved through an emotional intelligence skill-based training course.

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Marital, Adjustment, Students, Iran

## 1. Background

Emotional intelligence represents the ability of individuals to recognize, understand, and manage their own and other's emotions to utilize emotional information in enhancing thought and behavior. Several researchers in different fields have studied emotional intelligence and found the construct associated with a variety of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, such as mental health, relationship satisfaction, and work performance (1-3).

Studies showed that traditional measures of cognitive intelligence (IQ) is not a sufficient predictor of success (academically, professionally, and socially) in life (4, 5) and this led scholars to the concept of emotional intelligence (EI), coined by Salovey and Mayer (6). They developed the origin theory of emotional intelligence and Goleman popularized the concept (4). Conceptualizations of emotional

intelligence include competencies, such as social and interpersonal skills. Goleman explained that emotional and cognitive intelligence, and IQ, at best conditions, are only 20% effective in a person's successful life and 80% of it depends on other factors (4). In other words, in many circumstances, people's life condition depends on their social skills, which are part of emotional intelligence itself (7).

Emotional capabilities impact many human functions. A growing number of scientific researchers showed that emotional intelligence empirically affects quality of life, vocational and educational successes, resistance to stress, problem solving, health and social and marital relationships. Results of researches showed that emotional intelligence is a dynamic key factor to a successful and happy life of human beings (8). Moreover, findings of previous researches suggested that emotional intelligence correlates

with success or failure in different aspects of life of individuals (9, 10).

In terms of interpersonal skills, family is the smallest unit of the society, in which an individual is challenged to develop competencies. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes families as an essential unit in the society that are the founders of personality and values and marital adjustment, which have impacts on health of couples and their children. Also, researchers explained that emotional abilities are significant for social communications because emotions serve interactive and social functions, convey information about people's thoughts and their intentions, and social presentation (11, 12), which indicates their emotional capacity to understand and manage emotions in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, studies have suggested that there is a positive correlation between marital adjustment and conscientiousness and a negative correlation with neuroticism across different genders. However, openness is significantly correlated with marital adjustment among males only (11).

In another study, similar trends were observed between total score in marital adjustment and dimensions of the Big Five Theory among both men and women, whereas openness was not correlated with marital adjustment across both genders (13).

In other words, the main components of emotional intelligence are social and adaptive skills, which define compatibility, problem solving, and realistic attitude of an individual in interpersonal interactions, explained by interpersonal components, which include the individual's ability to adapt to others and social and communication skills (11, 14). In a marriage, accommodation of spouses to each other occurs over a period of time and has been conceptualized as a process, which is determined by the degree of feeling, happiness, union, satisfaction, affection, and tension experienced by a spouse (15).

Marital adjustment can be explained by the help of psychodynamic and social learning models.

Literature shows that there are several tests to measure marital adjustment, which is an important aspect of studying marriage.

Furthermore, Ellis defined marital satisfaction as the actual experience of joy, satisfaction, and happiness among couples, as they consider all aspects of their marriage. He also explained that marital dissatisfaction can be caused by the lack of these feelings between spouses (16). Therefore, marital dissatisfaction can be the result of the gradual loss of emotional attachment, lack of attention, emotional distance (affective interval), and increased feeling of being indifferent and apathetic.

Fitness in his study emphasized that spouses should be mindful that emotional intelligence does not solely sus-

tain marital happiness, and couples must be sincere in their marriage (14). Moreover, in terms of partners, both sides should exhibit care and compassion to each other and take responsibilities (7).

Bricker found that there is a meaningful relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction. Their research showed that successful marital outcome has a significant relationship with interpersonal skills in resolving conflicts, and closeness and intimacy between the spouse (17, 18).

Fitness emphasized on the function of emotional intelligence in close relationships, specifically the positive relationship between emotional perspicuity and marital happiness (14, 19, 20). In order to help spouses to understand, communicate, and manage their feelings (i.e. love, hate, anger, fear and joy), an emotional intelligence marriage allows spouses to share these strong feelings, which play an important role in marital satisfaction. Furthermore, it is encouraged to signify EQ in any context, and marriage is not an exception of concern (14, 17).

Salovey and Mayer's research indicated that emotional intelligence has a significant impact on marital adjustment and conflict management (6). Also, Goleman explained that emotional intelligence is the ability to manage mood and mental condition and control mental impulses. Failure of achieving a good emotional intelligence is a factor, which discourages motivation and hope in an individual (4).

A marital relationship is a complex and versatile evolutionary process. A couple's relationship is mostly based on four fundamental factors, namely emotional, cognitive, financial, and marital relationships (2, 7, 21). Recently, helping couples improve their relationships has significantly become important because the family is one of the main pillars of the society and a core factor in the couple's and their children's growth. In order to define and resolve couples' marital problems, it is required to identify the influential causes of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Marital satisfaction depends on numerous factors, including individuals' thinking process, self- and others-perception, life expectation, personality, emotion, etc. (21-23).

Schutte et al. conducted several studies and investigated the relationship between EI and interpersonal relationship of married couples and found a highly positive link (18). What is not yet clear is the impact of EI-based education on the marital adjustment of married couples in various populations, including university students or spouses. Educated and academic people are highly valued in most societies. Their influential roles in industries and the advancement of a society are not hidden from anyone. Therefore, their mental health and interpersonal interac-

tion should not be ignored. In other words, developing a healthy interpersonal relationship in a small and intimate society, like the family, is as important as other social functions. Hence, the researchers of the current study, conducted a pilot research on the impact of EQ-based training on marital adjustment of educated couples in a public university in the north of Iran.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The current study was a quasi-experimental research. The sample consisted of 60 married couples, aged 22 to 29 years old, among the students of Mazandaran University of Iran (Table 1). For inclusion in the study, the couples had to be married, at least for three years. This research had two phases. At first, the correlation and cohesion of the variables was assessed. In the next phase and based on the research objectives, the researchers assessed the impact of the EQ-based training on marital satisfaction. The 30 couples were selected randomly to participate in the research and attended training classes, and the rest were considered as the control group. The experimental group consisted of 30 couples, who participated in a training course of emotional intelligence skills and the other 30 couples remained untrained. The pre and post training tests were executed for both groups.

Tests included Bar-On emotional intelligence test (24, 25) and Har Mohan-Singh marital adjustment questionnaire (26).

Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EQI) scales: Bar-on emotional intelligence questionnaire has been selected since it is comprehensive and simple with no cultural-biased item reported. This questionnaire reports only non-cognitive (emotional, personal, and social) intelligence and it is applicable to any educational, industrial, clinical, and medical context.

In 1980, Bar-On explained the concept, definition, and measuring scales of non-cognitive intelligence. In his study, he reported the retest coefficient as 0.85 and 0.75 after one and four months, respectively. The internal consistency using Cronbach alpha in seven different populations was reported as 0.69 and 0.86 for the subscale of social responsibility, and 0.76 for self-respect (24). Test answers were set on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, partially disagree, and strongly disagree). This questionnaire was modified and normalized for 500 students at Isfahan University. Phases of normalizing the questionnaire were factor analysis, internal consistency, split-half, reliability of the test, and test-retest reliability coefficient (retest in a three-week interval). The reliability coefficient was reported as 0.68.

### 2.1. Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (Har Mohan-Singh)

This questionnaire was developed by Singh and normalized in Iran by Karami (26). The test was developed in two forms: (a) husbands and (b) wives. It consists of 40 questions for each group. The questionnaire was distributed among 600 couples, inclusive of (1) school teachers (elementary up to high schools), (2) university teachers (higher education, degree and masters) (3) medical doctors, (4) lawyers (those involved in civil and criminal services), (5) business men (vender to big industries) and (6) employees (clerks to managers). This classification was primarily developed based on the time they spent at their jobs and based on their careers and social acceptability. After running the factor analysis, 10 categories were obtained and involved in statistical measurement and scales. Ten questions with dichotomous yes or no answers were allocated to each gender. Then, on a continuous scale of +10 to +1, degree of maximum compatibility (+10 stands for max and +1 or min) was measured.

For scoring the questionnaire, the score on each question was summed up cumulatively and classified in 10 categories (1 = min adjustment and 10 = max adjustment).

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for six career categories and for the total group. This was calculated via split-half and the Spearman-Brown formula. The test showed that minimum coefficient for the lawyers was 0.80 and the maximum coefficient for the employees was 0.90 (26).

### 2.2. Data Analysis

In order to describe the demographic characteristics in this study, the researchers used descriptive statistical analysis. The Paired *t*-test was applied to investigate the different effects of training courses for participants. The analysis was run with SPSS version 20 software.

### 2.3. Implementation Method

Initially, the goal and research framework were established. This was followed by identifying the statistical population of this study. Secondly, emotional intelligence skills were taught to the participants. With the training course, it was expected to significantly increase the couples' marital adjustment.

Furthermore, it is expected that increased emotional intelligence boosts marital adjustment of the couples. This is a process that will continue until the end of their lives.

The aim of this study was to test two hypotheses:

1. Does communication skills training on emotional intelligence increases emotional intelligence among the couples?

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Population in the Two Subject Groups

Variables	Group (N = 60)							
	Experiment (N = 30)				Control (N = 30)			
<b>Gender</b>	Female		Male		Female		Male	
<b>Education</b>	Degree		Degree		Degree		Degree	
<b>N</b>	15		15		15		15	
<b>Age range</b>	22 - 25	26 - 29	22 - 25	26 - 29	22 - 25	26 - 29	22 - 25	26 - 29
<b>N</b>	6	9	8	7	7	8	5	10
<b>Percentage</b>	40	60	53.33	46.66	46.66	53.33	33.33	66.66

2. Does increased emotional intelligence increase the couples' marital adjustment?

To examine these hypotheses, the researcher randomly selected 30 couples (30 men and 30 women), among those, who participated in the first phase of this study and were interested to attend the emotional intelligence skills training course. Then, they split the cases to two groups of 30 (couples); group A (control group) and group B (experimental group).

Firstly, the emotional intelligence and marital adjustment tests were administered for all couples and the gained data were analyzed. Then a training course (communication skills based on emotional intelligence) was developed for the experimental group to attend. At the end of the training course, the same test was administered again and the differences of the data in both phases of pre- and post-test was examined and investigated.

### 3. Results

Table 2 indicates the impact of the training course on the subjects' emotional intelligence between the two experimental and control groups. Data analysis showed that conducting the training course had a significant impact on the experimental group ( $P < 0.001$ ).

This means that the students' emotional intelligence before and after attending the training had a meaningful difference. Moreover, the data showed that emotional intelligence in the control group had no significant difference in the pre- and post-test ( $P > 0.05$ ). This means that emotional intelligence among the subjects in the control group, who did not participate in the training, had no significant difference.

Table 3 shows the impact of the emotional intelligence training course on the subjects' marital adjustment between the two experimental and control groups. Analysis of data indicated that the training had an impact on the students' marital adjustment in the experimental group

( $P < 0.001$ ). This means that there was a meaningful difference in marital adjustment of subjects before and after attending the training course. Table 3 also shows there was no significant difference between the scores of the control group during this study ( $P > 0.005$ ).

### 4. Discussion

Previous studies showed that EQ-based training may improve emotional intelligence and enhance results associated with emotional intelligence (10, 15, 21). The researchers examined university students by providing information and training skills related to emotional intelligence as part of their introductory university course. Those, who had significantly higher EQ-based training score on trait or typical EQ at the end of the semester were more likely to complete their first year of university compared to the control group with no intervention. The retention rate for the EQ experimental group was determined as 98% compared to the control group (87%). The outcomes included mental and physical health, social relationships, and work performance. Moreover, Salovey's study showed a meaningful significant impact of EQ on marital adjustment and conflict management among couples (4, 6). Schneewind and Gerhard also found training in life and EQ skills can increase marital adjustment of couples in their study (23). Further studies should be carried out to confirm these initial outcomes and to uncover how training improves emotional intelligence, which specific training skills are best, and what significant findings can be produced. The potential benefits of education in emotional intelligence is evident in many areas, from education to marriages, to occupations, and to better understanding of the functioning of communities, and many disciplines can contribute to examine the impacts of targeted trainings on emotional intelligence.

#### 4.1. Conclusion

The findings of the current research showed that an increase in emotional intelligence can affect the marital

**Table 2.** Impact of the Training Course on the Subjects' Emotional Intelligence

Variable	EQ, $\mu \pm SD$		Statistical Model		
	Before Training	After Training	t	df	P Value
Experimental group	327.76 $\pm$ 44.66	343.70 $\pm$ 43.21	-4.38	29	0.000
Control groups	337.13 $\pm$ 34.01	336.63 $\pm$ 35.39	0.96	29	0.34

**Table 3.** The Impact of EQ Training Course on the Subjects' Marital Adjustment

Variable	Marital Adjustment, $\mu \pm SD$		Statistical Model		
	Before Training	After Training	t	df	P Value
Experimental group	62.26 $\pm$ 14.38	73.23 $\pm$ 10.47	-4.36	29	0.000
Control group	64.26 $\pm$ 20.31	63.76 $\pm$ 20.50	1.74	29	0.09

adjustment of participants. Conducting emotional intelligence skills training course based on cognitive psychology led to significant changes in marital adjustment of the participants. This means marital adjustment of students, who attended training, was higher than those, who did not attend and this difference was statistically significant and meaningful. Moreover, EQ and education level had a direct relationship, therefore, it can be expected that the EQ skills training has a higher impact on educated people compared to the working class, illiterates or those with low literacy. It is highly recommended for future studies to conduct a comparative analysis to find more evidence on the effect of education level on the efficacy of EQ skills-based trainings on couples.

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