

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of preventive mental health and emotional well-being as essential components of overall health. Emotional wellness, long recognized by the World Health Organization as a foundation of human functioning, remains inadequately integrated into school curricula. Adolescents, in particular, face a rising burden of emotional dysregulation, academic stress, anxiety, and maladaptive coping strategies. This paper introduces *Emotional Ability Resources (EaR)*, a framework that emphasizes skill-based, scalable, and cost-effective methods to enhance emotional intelligence through storytelling. EaR is defined as an umbrella of resources, both internal and external, that allow individuals to experience emotional well-being through the skillful use of emotional intelligence. Storytelling, a practice rooted in cultural traditions and validated by modern psychology, is explored here as an EaR intervention. The EaR storytelling model consists of three structured sessions: (1) using narratives to explore emotional experiences, (2) applying qualitative reflection and mindfulness, and (3) extending learning by engaging with underprivileged children in peer-mentorship roles. These sessions empower students to reflect, express, and manage emotions constructively, thereby fostering resilience, empathy, and self-awareness. Findings suggest that storytelling can serve as a transformative preventive intervention for adolescents, equipping them to navigate emotions effectively and reducing long-term risks of mental health crises. The integration of EaR storytelling into schools provides a sustainable path to nurturing emotionally intelligent and mentally healthy students.

Keywords: *Emotional Ability Resources, Emotional Well-Being, Storytelling, Students, Preventive Mental Health*

Conflux and chaos is usually a precursor to change of any kind. The past few chaos-ridden pandemic years have left no one in any doubt about the importance of focusing on emotional well-being and preventive mental health care as a lifestyle choice. In this current climate, it is important to explore paradigms which influence physical health, mental health and well-being.

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The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

No discussion on health can be complete without taking mental health into consideration. World Health Organisation defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.” The definition was broadened by the paper, *Our Healthier Nation*, which elucidated the importance of emotional well-being for health and which defined health as “being confident and positive and able to cope with the ups and downs of life” (WHO, 1947, Secretary of state for health, 1998).

Since the 90s, mental health interventions have been given increasing importance in many health-related research studies and public health interventions. Many scientists showed evidence that health could no longer be viewed from just a physical perspective and the role of emotional well-being came to be acknowledged in this arena (Pavis, 1996, Tillford, 1997). WHO now recognizes mental health as the foundation of health and well-being. It elucidates it as an important component, which underpins individual as well as collective decision-making ability regarding all facets of one’s environment and world. Currently, WHO elucidates that “Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community”. (WHO, 2022)

People function well when their emotions are manageable. Researchers have shown that a lot of physical distress, health-related complaints and even life-threatening diseases, have their roots in how people feel about their world. Their mental wellness is internally felt as well as externally visible, by the balanced approach that they have towards their lives circumstances and painful emotions. Individuals lose control of their own lives and feel unable to cope or get emotionally dysregulated, when they are unable to manage their own overwhelming thoughts. (Stewart-Brown, 1998).

Although "well-being" is a well-known and widely used term, its definition is unclear. Therefore, a holistic approach is considered desirable when addressing anything related to this concept as researchers have highlighted two broad aspects. (ACE, 2018).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The two aspects of Well-Being: Objective and Subjective

In recent years, policymakers and social scientists have paid much attention to well-being, a concept related to people's ability to lead healthy, creative, and fulfilling lives. Two conceptual approaches dominate well-being research- Objective and Subjective. Objective approaches define well-being in terms of quality-of-life indicators such as material resources (income, food, housing, etc.) and social characteristics (education, health, political outreach, social networks, connections). A subjective approach emphasizes subjective well-being, such as people's own assessment of life, especially life satisfaction (cognitive assessment), happiness (positive emotional state), unhappiness (negative emotional state). Each one’s own experience of life in general, evaluated on the basis of daily thoughts and emotions is, called subjective well-being. Modern lens of Well-being delves into all three domains of mental processes: cognitive, cognitive and affective.

Emotional well-being is a holistic approach to well-being which encompasses both these view points, including the three domains of mind.

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

Emotional Well-Being

Emotional Well-Being (EWB) has been defined as an overall positive state of one's emotions, life satisfaction, sense of meaning and purpose, and ability to pursue self-defined goals. Emotional Well-Being includes elements like a sense of balance in emotions, thoughts, interpersonal relationships, and interests. A sense of satisfaction increases emotional well-being, whereas perceived stress decreases EWB. (CTST report, 2016)

According to **Kahnemann**, “Emotional well-being refers to the emotional quality of an individual's everyday experience—the frequency and intensity of experiences of joy, stress, sadness, anger, and affection that make one's life pleasant or unpleasant” (**Kahnemann, 2010; pp.16489**)

Emotional well-being is that personal space which makes every individual feel that the positives in their life outweigh the negatives. This scientific trail of thought is very beneficial, especially, in the present times when mental health and well-being issues in students are on the rise in spite of the research, attention and talk surrounding it. While there was an increasing body of literature on recommendations for inclusion of mental health and emotional well-being interventions, at all levels of society, the burgeoning mental health crisis in recent years, since 2020, has shown that, in actuality, not enough was done in practice. Many people who managed to keep themselves safe physically during the pandemic and its aftermath, were unable to manage their own emotions which resulted in poor mental health clearly visible as dysfunctional behavior patterns, maladaptive coping and other issues, impacting their life and well-being in all spheres. The reason is simple. While people learned to identify symptoms of mental health breakdown, there was a lack of information, awareness and understanding about what they could do, once they identified poor mental health.

Many studies today, show that an alarming number of students are struggling to manage themselves, their work, their relationships and their overall sense of well-being. Their emotions are all over the place, and they are unable to manage their minds, successfully. Poor academic performance, lack of focus, suicide ideation, indecisiveness, increased vulnerability to life threatening diseases, aggression, rage, poor communication skills, isolated lifestyle, robotic existence, excessive chemical dependency, gaming addictions, increase phone usage, lack of sleep, eating disorders, burnout and lacklustre attitude are common place issues. How to cope with depression, anxiety, OCD and stress are deemed to be the most searched keywords by them, showing that these are their daily concerns.

Most challenges of school students are dealt with in a curative model rather than a preventive one. This leads to wastage of time, money, resources and also students' overall performance and well-being. Therefore, the need of the hour is to emphasize on preventive interventions, which have the potential to nip potential problems in the bud.

If problems are not addressed timely, these adolescents are at high risk of becoming unhealthy and grow up to be a menace to society as dysfunctional adults who are prone to many socially unacceptable behaviours and mental illnesses.

The effective solution is inculcation of a lifestyle of self-care for emotional well-being, while they are adolescents. Today, at an individual and societal level, there is a dire need for multi-level policy initiatives that help people manage themselves, successfully. The arena of

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

emotional well-being is all encompassing. It affects academic performance, work, relationships as well as personal functioning and choices.

In recent years, a compelling body of scientific research has underscored the presence of a globally significant yet often overlooked issue—the deficit in emotional well-being, whether overtly acknowledged or not. The National Center for Emotional Wellness (NCEW) firmly characterizes emotional well-being as "an awareness, understanding, and acceptance of feelings, coupled with the ability to navigate effectively through periods of change or challenge." In essence, emotional well-being is integral to achieving equilibrium. The comprehension of all emotions, devoid of value judgments categorizing them as either positive or negative, empowers individuals to cultivate awareness of their emotional landscape. This understanding provides them with the agency to discern how to effectively process emotions, thus mitigating the sense of helplessness often associated with emotional challenges (Diener, 2009).

A lot of Western psychologists are re-thinking their rigid theoretical orientations like Behavioristic, Psychodynamic or Humanistic and opening up their boundaries and constraints to include result oriented Eastern traditions like Mindfulness, within their therapeutic orientations. The yearly conferences and latest body of research by premier academic institutions like **Harvard Medical School**, invariably have keynote speakers talking on bio psychosocial topics. New age techniques, rooted in ancient wisdom, are being used to devise interventions like Yoga, Mindfulness, Meditation practices as they are scientifically demonstrating their effectiveness in tackling issues like anxiety, depression, stress and personality, with fewer side effects than conventional pharmacology-based approaches. While academic policymakers are opening up to the benefits of these measures, there is always an ongoing search and need for a more equitable, cost effective and scalable model. Using the Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) model is now one such viable option.

Emotional Ability Resources (EaR):

EaR has been defined in the book *Emotional Ability Resources* as “An umbrella of resources, both internal and external, to experience emotional well-being by skillful use of one’s emotional intelligence” (Sureka, 2023; p.14).

Emotional intelligence is defined by Mental Health America as “Emotional Intelligence (EI) is **the ability to manage both your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you**. There are five key elements to EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.”

Although Emotional Intelligence is now widely accepted as a useful concept for sound mental health, productivity and growth, its use in school curriculum is limited. One of the reasons for this is a lack of a framework which is generalizable, cost effective, sustainable and scalable. The superpower of EaR is its simple approach to well-being, flexibility, adaptability and cumulative tendencies. It streamlines as well as inculcates personal responsibility in all participants, so that they are able to tap their EI and build on it in a skill-based manner.

There is growing interest in the efficacy of practical resources like EaR which can empirically demonstrate how emotional well being can be every student’s reality. Before a person reaches to a point of distress, one can use personal resources like EAR to de-stress

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

themselves by taking the responsibility of their own healthy thinking, feeling and behaving. This EaR model of storytelling creates a safe space for them to use their innate EI skillfully to vent out in a healthy manner and grow their EI and resilience in mere 3 sessions to experience EWB.

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) model has undergone comprehensive research and culminated in its individual project incubation during the Teaching, Learning, and Innovation Program of 2023 (TLI, 2023) in Boston. This initiative, led by Dr. Felipe Fregni, 2023 of Harvard Medical School, marks a significant advancement in the development and refinement of the EaR model. As he said, and I quote, “Your passion for developing storytelling curriculum-based initiatives for students to promote preventive mental healthcare is truly inspiring, and we look forward to help you achieve your goals.” Its premise is simple. Using stories on mental health as an EAR intervention to help students build up on their EI skillfully to achieve EWB.

Storytelling proves to be an invaluable intervention, especially for school students, aiding them in recognizing and comprehending their emotions. Through narratives that mirror real-life scenarios, students can connect with characters facing emotional challenges, fostering a sense of identification and understanding. These stories become a catalyst for open discussions within the peer group or classroom, creating a safe space for students to express their feelings and enhance their emotional intelligence.

Numerous global studies support this assertion, revealing that through the use of stories and narratives, it is feasible to profoundly bring about the emotional well-being in young individuals, relieving them of the everyday challenges they encounter by using their innate EI and building their emotional strength. (Rajabpour Farkhani, 2013; Matthews, 2014) Stories with specific content like mental health and and EWB prime students to address diverse challenges along with indoctrinating them with a range of healthy solutions for their issues. Since, time immemorial, storytelling has emerged as a highly effective approach in engaging with humans across all ages, offering a means for them to navigate and express emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that may be challenging to articulate verbally. These narratives serve as valuable reservoirs of materials and resources, enabling the extraction of meanings, fostering understanding, and providing profound insights. Consequently, stories play a crucial role in facilitating transformative changes by offering essential frameworks for growth and development. (Sanaat-negar, 2012)

Earlier storytelling interventions used to be focused on building moral values, as seen in Buddhist Zen stories or Jataka Tales. Even today, storytelling is used in various settings, like cooperates and academia, to facilitate group cohesiveness, improve performance and other ancillary desirable outcomes. With mental health, what has been seen is that stories are mainly used with clinical population as a narrative technique, rather than as a preventive mental health care resource or as a tool to skill up EI to enhance EWB. Therefore, the time is ripe to explore this specific framework of EaR which addresses the nuances ie. what, when, why and how of EI and Well-Being through storytelling.

Essentially, storytelling with EaR serves as a preparatory tool of EI, equipping children to navigate their emotions to achieve sound mental health and reap the benefits of EWB.

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

1. To explore how storytelling as an Emotional Ability Resource (EaR) can enhance emotional well-being in adolescents through preventive mental health interventions.

Sample

The model was designed for adolescents in school settings, with sessions conducted in classroom environments. Students were the primary participants, with an extension activity involving underprivileged children.

Instruments

- *Hope: Stories for a Healthy Mind (Sureka, 2020)*
- **Journaling and reflective writing exercises**
- **Mindfulness practices**

Procedure

The Model: Storytelling on mental health as an EaR tool

This EaR model of storytelling creates a safe space for students to use their innate EI skillfully to vent out in a healthy manner and grow their EI and resilience in mere 3 sessions to experience EWB.

Session 1: The Power of Narratives

The initial session had set the stage for emotional exploration. Seated in a circle, students immersed themselves in a narrated story from 'Hope: Stories for a Healthy Mind.' by Scholastic. (Sureka, 2020). The tale delved into the impact of criticism, parental discord, and mental health challenges within families, connecting these issues to manifestations like poor academic performance and communication difficulties. Each student reflects on their emotions through a personal narrative, breaking the chains of emotional suppression. An open discussion follows, providing a platform for articulating feelings and cultivating a relaxed mindset crucial for academic success.

Session 2: Qualitative Analysis and Mindfulness

Building on personal narratives, the second session delved into qualitative analysis of storytelling on mental health as an EaR tool. The differentiation between essays and personal narratives was explored, accompanied by the introduction of mindfulness techniques. Students learned to navigate challenging emotions and recognize the positive impact of emotions like confidence and joy. Crafting a life story became a medium for self-discovery, emphasizing emotional ability resources as tools for expression and well-being. Journaling has emerged as a significant aspect of mental well-being, empowering students to manage their minds by embracing the utility of all emotions.

Session 3: Extending Learning Beyond the Classroom

In the final session, individual growth transcended as students read their storybooks to underprivileged children. Beyond reading, one-on-one interactions created a mentorship dynamic, nurturing a sense of responsibility. As students encouraged underprivileged children to share their learnings through essays and life stories, a dual role as teachers and peer mental health ambassadors was established. Active listening and peer group learning became integral as participants contributed to the collective knowledge base, solidifying their understanding and actively participating in mental health advocacy.

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

RESULTS

Storytelling, woven into the fabric of the Emotional Ability Resources course, emerged as a transformative tool. From personal reflection to qualitative analysis and community engagement, it fostered emotional intelligence, self-expression, and mental well-being. The students, now equipped with the skills to navigate their own emotions, serve as advocates for mental health, creating a ripple effect that has the potential to extend beyond the classroom.

The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) initiative has demonstrated its effectiveness as an innovative teaching project, showcasing a skill-based approach applicable across diverse contexts and behaviors. It is poised to evolve into a comprehensive and invaluable resource, empowering students to assert control over their emotions, navigate challenges, and enhance their overall well-being.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need to adopt preventive rather than curative models of mental health intervention in schools. Adolescents today face growing emotional challenges, including stress, anxiety, and poor coping strategies, which often go unaddressed until they manifest as clinical concerns. By embedding Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) through storytelling, schools can equip students with lifelong tools for emotional regulation and resilience before crises develop.

If emotional well-being is neglected during adolescence, students risk becoming vulnerable to maladaptive behaviors, reduced academic performance, and long-term psychological difficulties. In contrast, preventive interventions such as EaR storytelling promote proactive skill development, helping students build healthier thought patterns, emotional balance, and interpersonal awareness. This approach supports both individual growth and broader societal well-being by reducing the future burden of untreated mental health concerns.

The EaR framework proves particularly effective because of its simplicity, adaptability, and cumulative benefits. Unlike resource-intensive therapeutic models, EaR leverages accessible methods such as storytelling, reflection, and mindfulness, which can be easily integrated into existing school systems. Its emphasis on personal responsibility further empowers students to take ownership of their emotional well-being, thereby enhancing sustainability and long-term impact.

Additionally, EaR aligns with the growing trend of integrating Eastern traditions such as mindfulness, yoga, and meditation into Western psychology. These practices, now widely acknowledged by premier academic institutions, demonstrate that holistic, non-pharmacological approaches can effectively reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. By situating storytelling within this evolving landscape, the EaR model addresses the need for equitable, scalable, and culturally adaptable interventions.

Overall, the discussion underscores that EaR storytelling is more than a teaching tool; it is a preventive strategy that nurtures empathy, self-awareness, and resilience. Its integration into educational policy and practice offers a promising path toward addressing the mental health crisis among adolescents.

CONCLUSION

A storytelling intervention based on EaR is a cost effective, equitable, generalizable and scalable approach to improve mental health in schools and bring about emotional well-being for one and all. Thus, by amalgamating the ancient but still relevant approach of storytelling with current needs, institutions can start simple storytelling and use EaR for the health and well-being of individual students so that they do not end up in crisis. EaR helps an individual to feel empowered with emotional well-being, to make informed decisions regarding thoughts, behaviours and actions. This results in regaining an overall sense and feeling of control, an enhanced ability to cope by minimizing the impact of difficulties, and staying focused on functioning healthily in spite of odds. By integrating this approach into the school system, educators could practically water the holistic development of students after cultivating empathy as well as EI and sowing the seeds of emotional well-being in the educational environment.

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The Emotional Ability Resources (EaR) Framework for Enhancing Emotional Intelligence in Students

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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