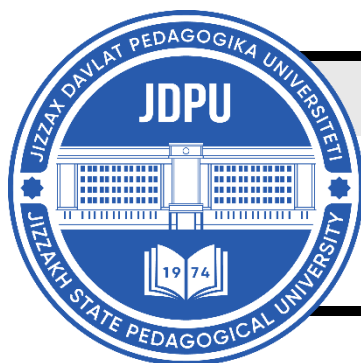


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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>INNOVATIVE CLASSROOM STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE SOCIAL  
INTELLIGENCE IN EFL STUDENTS**Ulugbek Abdurakhmanovich Jabbarov**

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## ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Social intelligence, EFL students, innovative strategies, classroom practices, communicative competence, collaborative learning, Uzbekistan, emotional intelligence, role-play, project-based learning.

**Received:** 16.05.25**Accepted:** 18.05.25**Published:** 20.05.25

**Abstract:** In the context of globalized education, developing not only linguistic but also social competencies has become essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This article explores innovative classroom strategies aimed at enhancing the social intelligence of EFL students in Uzbekistan. Social intelligence — the ability to understand, manage, and effectively navigate social situations — plays a critical role in successful communication and cultural adaptability. The paper examines practical methods such as collaborative learning, role-play, digital storytelling, and project-based tasks that foster empathy, cooperation, and interpersonal awareness. Drawing on qualitative classroom observations and feedback from both students and teachers, the study identifies which techniques are most effective in promoting social interaction and emotional understanding among learners. The findings suggest that integrating social intelligence-focused activities into language instruction not only improves communicative competence but also equips students with valuable life skills for

**Introduction.** In today's interconnected world, language learning extends far beyond grammar rules and vocabulary lists; it encompasses the development of interpersonal skills, emotional awareness, and the ability to navigate complex social interactions. Social intelligence—the capacity to understand and manage social relationships effectively—has emerged as a crucial complement to linguistic competence, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. For students in Uzbekistan, where English is increasingly seen as a gateway to global opportunities, nurturing social intelligence in the language classroom is not only beneficial but necessary.

Social intelligence enhances students' abilities to communicate with empathy, resolve conflicts, collaborate in diverse teams, and adapt to various cultural norms. These skills are particularly important in the EFL context, where communication often involves individuals from different backgrounds and belief systems. While traditional language instruction focuses on the cognitive aspects of language learning, there is a growing need to incorporate pedagogical approaches that also target students' social and emotional development.

Recent advancements in educational theory have emphasized the value of interactive, learner-centered methods in fostering both language proficiency and social competencies. Strategies such as collaborative learning, role-play, digital storytelling, and project-based learning are increasingly recognized for their dual benefits: they not only improve language skills but also encourage students to engage with peers in meaningful ways, enhancing their social awareness and emotional responsiveness.

This article aims to explore how innovative classroom strategies can be intentionally applied to enhance social intelligence among EFL students in Uzbekistan. By examining practical techniques grounded in current educational research and contextual classroom experiences, the study seeks to offer actionable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers interested in fostering a more holistic approach to language education.

### **Materials and methods**

This study employed a qualitative approach supported by classroom-based action research to investigate the effectiveness of innovative classroom strategies in enhancing the social intelligence of EFL students in Uzbekistan. The research was conducted over the course

of one academic semester (16 weeks) at three secondary schools and two higher education institutions where English is taught as a foreign language.

The participants included 75 EFL students aged between 16 and 21 years, as well as 5 experienced EFL teachers. Students were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a representative mix of urban and semi-urban backgrounds. All participants had at least a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency, as assessed by their institutions' placement tests.

The main data collection instruments were:

- Observation checklists, used by researchers to assess student engagement, peer interaction, and emotional responsiveness during activities.
- Semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students, conducted at the beginning and end of the intervention to gather perceptions of social interaction and classroom atmosphere.
- Student reflection journals, maintained weekly, encouraged learners to self-assess their social growth and classroom experiences.
- Pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, adapted from standardized social intelligence assessment tools (e.g., Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale), to measure perceived changes in students' social competencies.

A series of innovative instructional strategies were integrated into the regular EFL curriculum. These included:

- Collaborative learning tasks (e.g., think-pair-share, group discussions, peer teaching)
- Role-play and simulations (e.g., problem-solving scenarios, job interviews)
- Digital storytelling projects, where students created and shared short video stories with moral or social themes
- Project-based learning, involving team research and presentations on culturally relevant social issues

Teachers received a one-day workshop on how to implement these strategies effectively and consistently. Each activity was designed to target specific components of social intelligence such as empathy, active listening, emotional regulation, and cooperation.

Qualitative data from interviews and reflection journals were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Quantitative data from pre- and post-questionnaires were processed

using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests to assess significant changes in student responses. Triangulation of data sources ensured the reliability and validity of findings.

## Results

The findings of the study reveal a significant positive impact of the implemented innovative classroom strategies on the development of social intelligence among EFL students. The results are presented according to the different instruments used in data collection.

Quantitative data collected through the adapted Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale indicated a notable improvement in students' social intelligence scores after the intervention. A paired sample t-test showed statistically significant increases in the following subscales:

- Social information processing: Mean score increased from 3.1 to 4.2 ( $p < 0.01$ )
- Social skills: Mean score increased from 3.3 to 4.5 ( $p < 0.01$ )
- Social awareness: Mean score increased from 3.0 to 4.1 ( $p < 0.01$ )

These findings suggest that students became more aware of social cues, more confident in interpersonal interactions, and more skilled in navigating group dynamics in English.

Observations confirmed increased student participation, peer cooperation, and emotional engagement during classroom activities. Students who were initially shy or passive gradually took active roles in group work and class discussions. Teachers noted improvements in students' abilities to listen actively, offer support to peers, and express opinions respectfully.

Key observed behaviors included:

- Frequent use of eye contact and open body language during interactions
- Increased use of polite expressions and turn-taking language in English
- Enhanced ability to manage disagreements constructively during group tasks

Analysis of student journals indicated enhanced self-awareness and emotional regulation. Many students reflected on how the collaborative and interactive activities helped them overcome nervousness, build friendships, and understand others' perspectives. One student wrote, "I used to be afraid of speaking in front of others, but now I can share my thoughts and listen better."

Themes identified from reflections included:

- Growing empathy and patience
- Recognition of personal growth in teamwork and communication
- Increased motivation to participate in English lessons

Teachers unanimously agreed that the integration of social intelligence-focused strategies made their classrooms more dynamic and student-centered. They observed that students became more open-minded, collaborative, and emotionally resilient. One teacher noted, “These strategies didn’t just improve English skills; they taught students how to understand each other and work together as a team.”

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating innovative classroom strategies into EFL instruction can significantly enhance students' social intelligence, especially in the context of Uzbekistan where English is a foreign language and often associated with academic or career advancement. The observed improvements in students' social awareness, empathy, collaboration, and communication skills underscore the importance of incorporating social-emotional learning components into language teaching.

The substantial increase in post-intervention scores on the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale supports the claim that social intelligence can be cultivated through targeted pedagogical methods. This aligns with previous research suggesting that social skills, like language skills, are teachable and develop through interaction, feedback, and reflection (Goleman, 2006; Albrecht, 2006).

Collaborative learning activities and project-based tasks were particularly effective in encouraging students to engage with one another, practice active listening, and express themselves respectfully. These findings confirm that peer interaction in structured group settings not only facilitates language acquisition but also nurtures the interpersonal competencies that are crucial for success in both academic and real-life settings. The integration of role-play and digital storytelling enabled students to simulate real-world situations, encouraging empathy and perspective-taking—core components of social intelligence.

Moreover, the qualitative data from journals and interviews highlighted a shift in students' attitudes toward communication and classroom participation. Students began to view the classroom not only as a place to improve their English, but also as a social space where they could develop confidence, trust, and mutual respect. This is a particularly valuable outcome in educational settings where students may feel pressure to focus solely on academic performance rather than emotional or interpersonal growth.

Teachers' reflections further validate the positive impact of these strategies, as they reported more engaged classrooms, improved peer cooperation, and greater student autonomy. Their observations reinforce the idea that when students are taught in environments that value emotional awareness and social connection, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and motivation to learn.

However, the study also revealed challenges. Some students initially resisted collaborative work due to unfamiliarity with group-based tasks or lack of confidence in their spoken English. This highlights the need for gradual scaffolding and continuous teacher support when introducing such innovative approaches. Additionally, teacher training is essential to ensure that educators are equipped to design and facilitate activities that promote both linguistic and social development.

In sum, the study illustrates that when social intelligence is embedded as a goal within language education, students gain more than just communicative competence—they also develop the essential soft skills needed to thrive in diverse social and professional environments.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the impact of innovative classroom strategies on enhancing the social intelligence of EFL students in Uzbekistan. The results clearly indicate that social intelligence is not an innate trait alone but can be cultivated through purposeful, interactive, and student-centered teaching methods. Strategies such as collaborative learning, role-playing, digital storytelling, and project-based tasks created a supportive learning environment where students could engage meaningfully with their peers, build empathy, improve their communication, and foster mutual respect.

Integrating social-emotional learning into language education helped students move beyond textbook knowledge to develop real-life communication and interpersonal skills. This holistic approach proved particularly effective in the EFL context, where language learning often lacks authentic social engagement. By encouraging active participation, emotional awareness, and cooperative learning, the strategies employed in this study contributed to both linguistic and personal development.

The positive feedback from teachers and the significant improvements observed in students' social intelligence highlight the potential of these innovative methods to transform

EFL classrooms into dynamic spaces of growth and interaction. Therefore, educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers are encouraged to incorporate social intelligence development into language teaching frameworks to better prepare students for the communicative demands of the modern world.

Future research can further explore the long-term effects of such strategies, their scalability across different educational contexts, and their influence on academic performance and intercultural competence.

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