

Original Research Article

## Views of Families of Kindergarten Students on the Degree of Strengthening Emotional Intelligence through Differentiated Teaching and Learning

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### Article History

Received: 24.01.2025

Accepted: 01.03.2025

Published: 11.03.2025

### Journal homepage:

<https://www.easpublisher.com>

### Quick Response Code



**Abstract:** The concept of Emotional Intelligence is a clear and original field of study and research that has aroused the interest of the scientific community in recent years. The implementation of Differentiated Teaching and Learning, as a high-quality teaching, is a key factor in achieving the set learning goals, social skills but also the satisfaction of the psycho-emotional needs of all students. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the opinions of thirty-two (N:32) families of preschool children on the degree of strengthening of children's Emotional Intelligence by utilizing Differentiated Teaching and Learning in kindergarten. The research was completed during the Academic Year 2023-2024. A structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to collect the research data. The data of this research highlighted the enhancement of Emotional Intelligence through the implementation of Differentiated Teaching and Learning in daily educational practice, a fact that was recorded in the opinions of the families of preschool students. The collaboration between family and school is crucial for the healthy emotional development of young children and creates a supportive environment that promotes their all-round development. A unified approach to the education and upbringing of children enhances their self-esteem, their social competence and their mental well-being.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, differentiated teaching and learning, family, preschool education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The family is the “first school” of a child’s emotional education and plays a crucial role in the development of emotional intelligence skills (Goleman, 2011). Through a close emotional connection and good communication with the family, children develop emotionally and socially. This process helps them become responsible, independent and self-confident. All of the child’s abilities—cognitive, social and emotional—are enhanced through mutual support, shared responsibility and empowerment in both the school and family environments. When these two environments work together and are in harmony, children feel emotionally safe, being the center of their interest (Epstein, 2018, Gottman, 2011, Bambalis, Tsoli & Stavrou, 2018). Thus, the importance of the family, and in particular the role of the parent in shaping

emotionally cultivated and intelligent children, is highlighted (Joshi & Dutta, 2015).

The communication of emotions in the family environment affects the social and emotional skills of their children, their ability to express, understand and regulate their own emotions (Denham & Burton, 2019, Katz & McClellan, 2018, Morris, *et al.*, 2018, Zhou, *et al.*, 2021). In this case, children adopt the behavior of their parents through learning processes that include imitation of behavioral patterns (Miller, 2020). Therefore, school-family communication and information exchange are extremely important (Sakellariou, 2008, Jayaram & Caeiro, 2017).

Emotional Intelligence is a critical element in education, as it affects academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and mental well-being of

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students. Developing Emotional Intelligence can improve the educational process by helping students manage their own emotions, recognize the emotions of others, and react appropriately (Parker, & Salovey, 2018).

Differentiated Teaching and Learning is a pedagogical approach that adapts instruction to the individual needs of students, enhancing their emotional development. According to Tomlinson (2017), differentiation allows teachers to adapt the content, process, and learning products to meet the different abilities and preferences of students. This adaptation can enhance students' self-esteem and confidence, as they feel that their needs are recognized and met. The use of differentiated teaching strategies can lead to better emotional regulation in students, as reported by Davis and Duhon (2020). The ability to choose activities that interest them motivates them to actively participate in the learning process, reducing anxiety and frustration. Furthermore, collaborative learning and interaction with peers promote the development of social skills and a sense of belonging (Hattie, 2019). Therefore, differentiated pedagogy not only enhances academic performance but also the emotional well-being of students.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Sample of the research**

In this study, the views of thirty-two (32) families whose children attend kindergarten were investigated, of which fifteen families belong to the control group and seventeen to the experimental group. The families of the experimental groups responded before the experimental implementation and after its completion, while the families of the control group, at the beginning and end of the school year.

### **2.2 Methodological approach**

The present research study, which is based on an experimental design, includes pre-test and post-test, experimental groups as well as control groups (Vamvoukas, 2002). The research applied the experimental procedure with independent groups, ensuring that the experimental and control groups have similar characteristics and are comparable. Through random sampling, the selected groups are considered equivalent, which enhances the validity and reliability of the study, without requiring the prediction of the effects on the experimental variables (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). In the experimental design, it was decided to follow the multi-methodological approach, with the use of quantitative and qualitative data (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994, Neumah, 2000, Yin, 2003). It was sought to obtain data with different and varied methods (Neumah, 2000; Yin, 2003). For data collection, both open and free techniques such as diaries, photographic material and diary keeping were utilized, as well as quantitative ones such as weighted scales recording the degree of Emotional Intelligence and

observation keys (Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2014; Cohen & Manion, 1994).

### **2.3 Experimental design**

The method used in this study is the experimental approach and two kindergarten classes with common characteristics participated. More specifically, two kindergarten classes were selected where students belonging to the same age group attended, common learning subjects were taught while the learning level, interests, readiness, socio-cultural background and the number of students did not differ significantly from each other. In the experimental group, the teacher utilized the philosophy of Differentiated Teaching and Learning throughout the school year. She utilized various strategies - Hierarchy and grading of activities, flexible grouping, asynchronous work, workstations, etc. - and a multitude of differentiation techniques - K. W. L, RAFT, jigsaw, cubing, graphic organizers, etc. The teacher followed the logic that governs differentiation and dictates the interrelationship of assessment with differentiation. In addition, it is important to mention that the teacher followed both organizational and pedagogical differentiation. More specifically, the content, the process, the final product, the learning environment were differentiated based on the learning profile, interests and readiness of each student. The implementation lasted one school year and the philosophy of Differentiated Teaching and Learning was followed in all subjects of the Kindergarten.

### **2.4 Research tool**

The questionnaire research method was chosen as the most appropriate for collecting data regarding the opinions of a representative sample of parents/guardians of students regarding the degree of enhancement of the Emotional Intelligence of preschool and school children with the implementation of Differentiated Teaching and Learning. The questionnaire allowed families to respond anonymously and without personal contact. It was created specifically for the requirements of this specific study and questions were adapted and selected from the Wang & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Scale - WEELS, 2002). The questions were based on the Likert scale, where participants indicated the level of agreement or importance with a statement, using a scale from 1 to 5. The questionnaire was structured on the basis of four categories: a) Ability to express individual emotions, b) Understanding the emotions of others, c) Use of emotions and d) Management of emotions, while consisting of a total of 10 "closed" questions. During the completion of the questionnaire, parents could ask questions and the researcher provided the necessary clarifications, without expressing personal opinions. After completing the questionnaire, they were asked if they wished to be informed about the results of the research, and the researcher thanked them for their participation.

**2.5 Research limitations**

The participants consisted of two kindergarten classes that presented similar characteristics. It is important to expand the research to more school classes and to all levels of education and for the participants to come from urban, semi-urban and rural areas. The families that participated in the process and completed the questionnaires belonged to both the control and experimental groups. In order to improve and be reliable the results regarding the enhancement of the Emotional Intelligence of preschool children with the implementation of Differentiated Teaching and Learning, the participation of many families at a national level is necessary.

**2.6 Analysis methods**

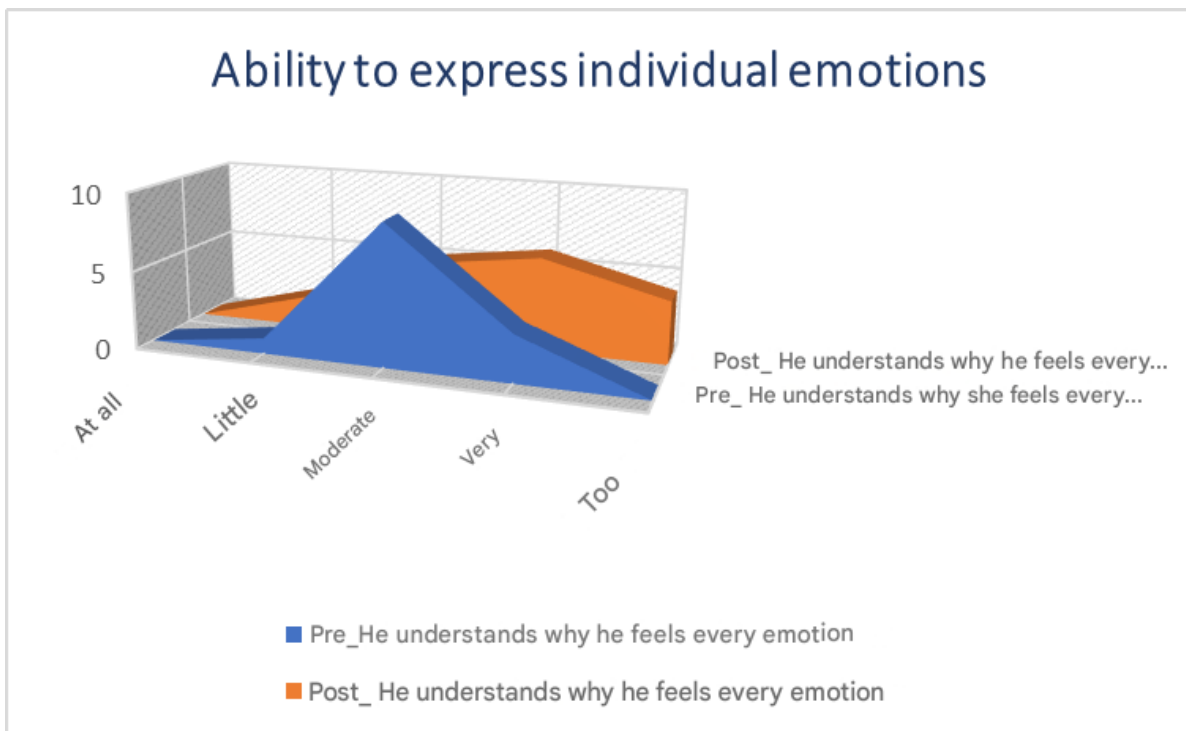
The statistical package SPSS 25.0 for Windows was used to analyze the quantitative data. The normality of the quantitative variables was checked using the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Quantitative variables with a normal distribution were expressed as mean ± standard deviation (mean ± standard deviation). To calculate the differences before and after the intervention, the paired sample t- test with statistical significance level  $p < 0.001$ .

**3. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

**3.1 Experimental group**

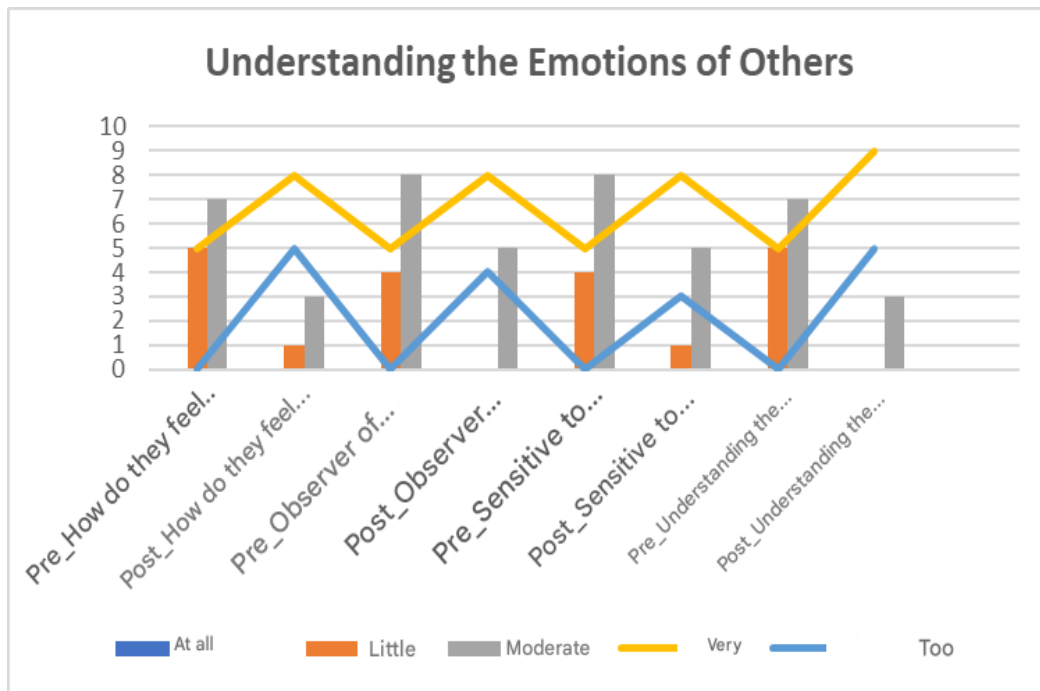
By recording the opinions of the families of the students in the experimental group of the Kindergarten, before and after the experimental intervention, in the dimension of the questionnaire concerning the ability to express individual emotions, it is found that the average values before the intervention were mostly in the moderate range, and after the intervention, they ranged mostly in the very and very high range.



**Figure 1: Ability to express individual emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Experimental group Kindergarten**

In the dimension of the questionnaire "Understanding the emotions of others" according to the opinions of the families of the students in the experimental group of Kindergarten, it is found that the

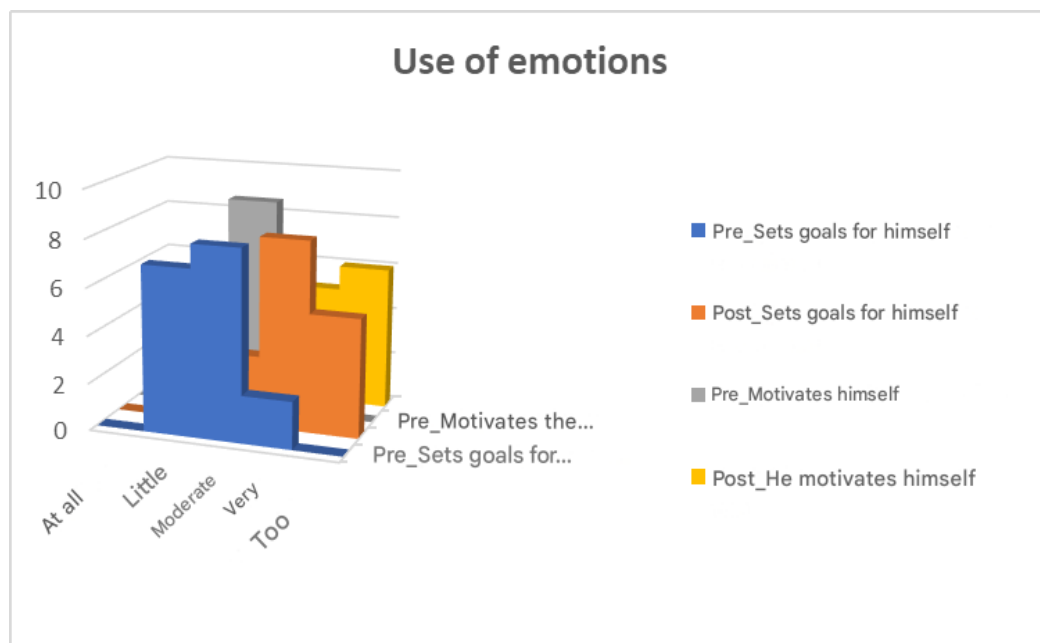
average values after the intervention were in the majority at much higher levels than before the experimental intervention.



**Figure 2: Understanding others' emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Experimental group Kindergarten**

According to the opinions of the families of the students in the experimental group of the Kindergarten, before and after the experimental intervention, in the dimension of the questionnaire concerning the use of

emotions, it is found that the average values before the intervention were mostly in the low and moderate range, while after the intervention they range mostly from low to moderate and largely to very high and very high.



**Figure 3: Use of emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Experimental group Kindergarten**

Regarding the category "Managing emotions", based on the records of the opinions of the families of Kindergarten students in the experimental group, we find

that there is a significant increase in responses from a little and moderate to a lot and very much.

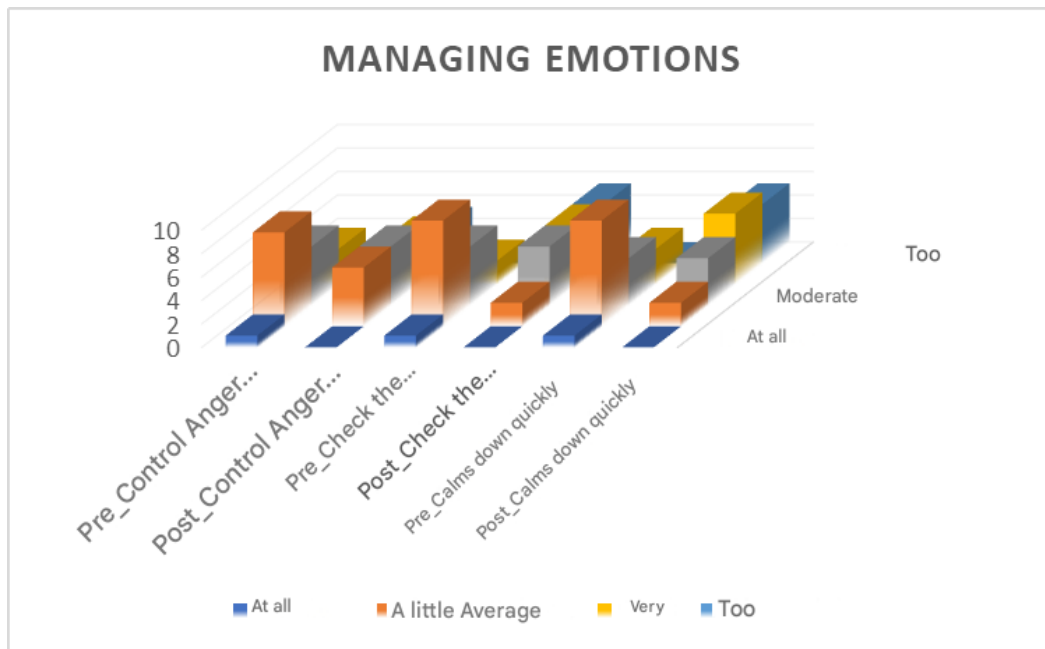


Figure 4: Managing emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Experimental group Kindergarten

### 3.2 Control Group - Kindergarten

For the Kindergarten control group, regarding the ability to express emotions, it is found that the average recording values at the beginning of the school year and before the intervention in the experimental

classes were mostly moderate, while after the intervention in the experimental classes and at the end of the school year, they ranged mostly with an increase in moderate and very high.

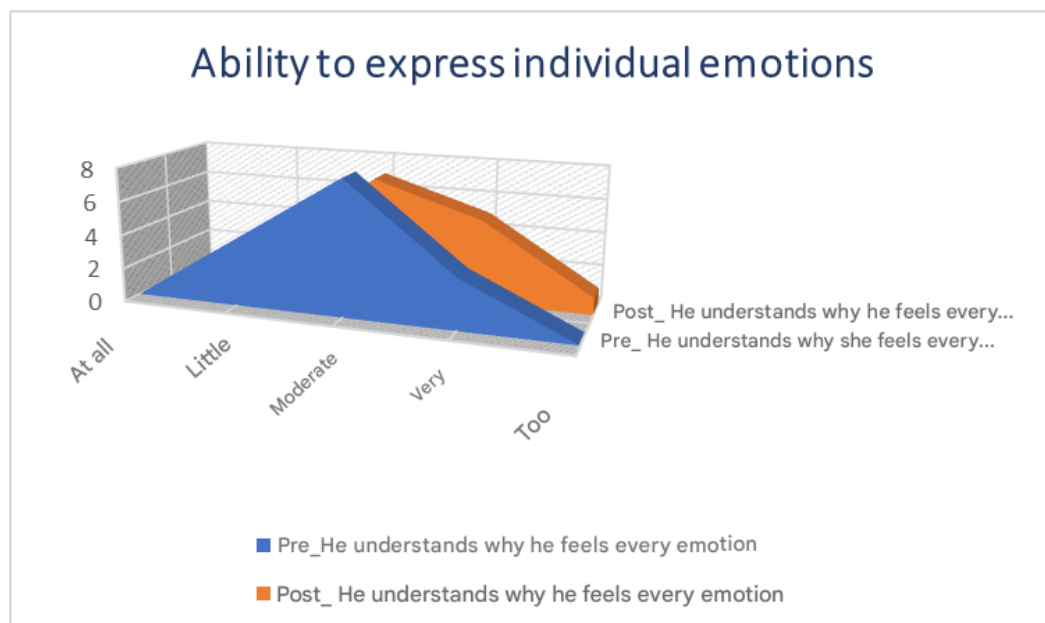
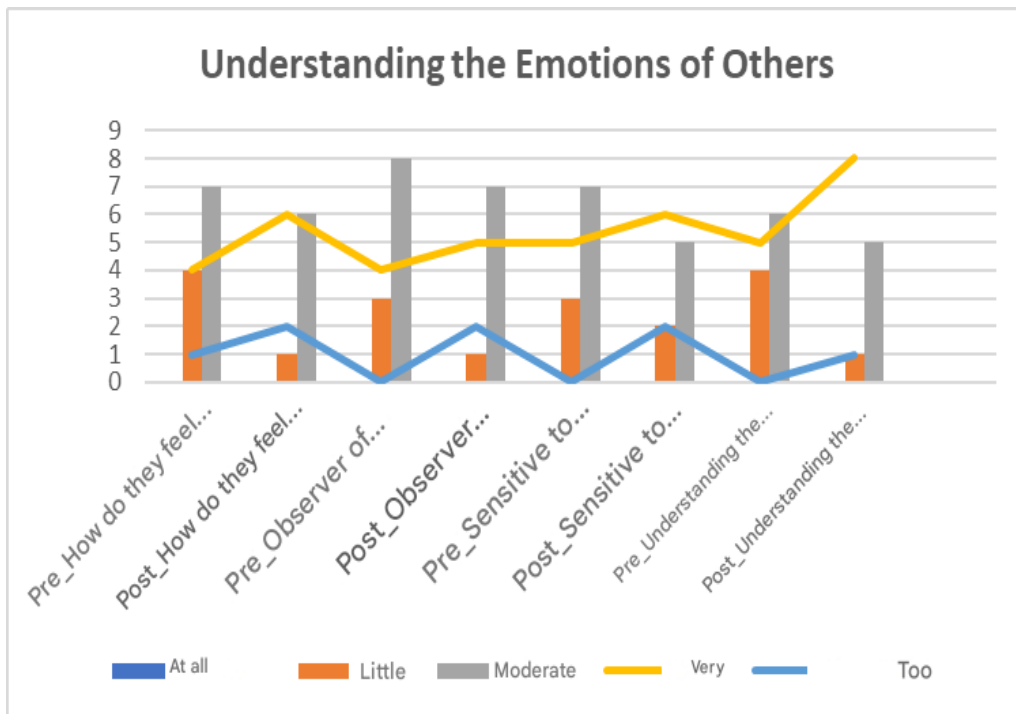


Figure 5: Ability to express individual emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Control Group

For the category that concerns understanding the emotions of others, the families of Kindergarten students from the control group, in the majority of them, from the beginning of the school year until the end, we

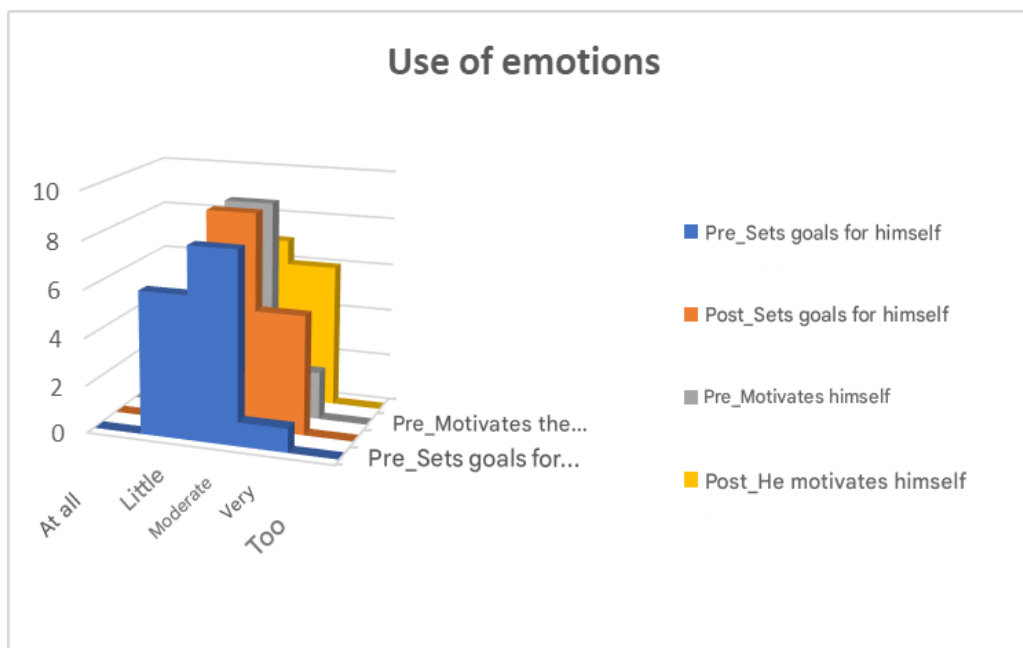
observe that they have statistically significant differences from small to moderate in the majority of them, however, here too the differences are less compared to the experimental group.



**Figure 6: Understanding others' emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Control Group**

The families of Kindergarten students from the control group, in the category of the questionnaire concerning the use of emotions before the intervention in the experimental class and at the beginning of the school

year, in their majority stated a little and moderate, while after the intervention in the experimental class and at the end of the school year, their opinions in the majority ranged from moderate to a lot.



**Figure 7: Use of emotions - Quantitative results on the whole before and after (pre – post) Control Group**

Regarding the management of emotions, the families of Kindergarten students from the control group, in the majority of them, from the beginning of the school year until the end, we observe that they present

statistically significant differences from small to moderate, however, even in this case, compared to the statistical differences in the experimental group, the difference is smaller.

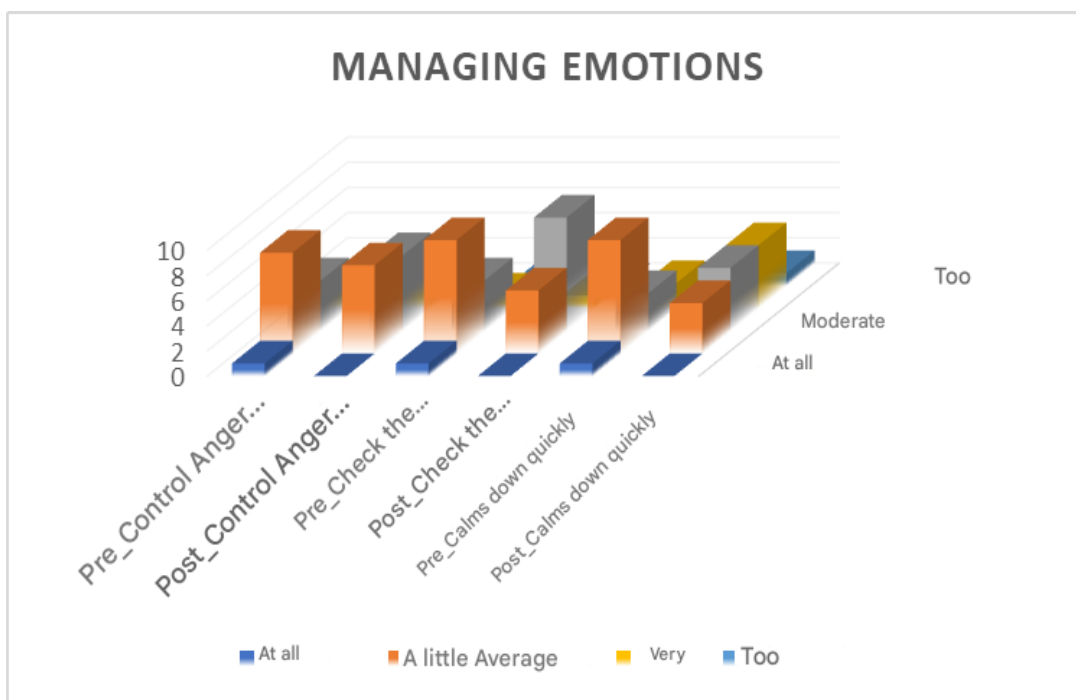


Figure 8: Emotion Management - Quantitative Results on the Total Before and After (pre – post) Control Group

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The data of this research highlighted the enhancement of Emotional Intelligence through the implementation of Differentiated Teaching and Learning in daily educational practice, a fact that was also observed by the families of preschool students. Through the opinions of the families recorded using a questionnaire, it was observed the enhancement in the ability to express individual emotions, in understanding the emotions of others, in the use and management of emotions.

Parents play a crucial role in the development of Emotional Intelligence because the early relationships and interactions that children have with their parents significantly influence their ability to recognize and manage their emotions (Smith & Brown, 2018, Bambalis, Tsoli & Stavrou, 2018, Joshi & Dutta, 2015). Parents who encourage open communication of emotions and empathy help their children develop the ability to understand and manage their emotions. This encouragement may include talking about emotions during everyday situations or supporting children during difficult emotional moments (Denham *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, educating parents about the importance of Emotional Intelligence can have positive effects on children's development. Domitrovich's research *et al.*, (2017) shows that parents who participate in Emotional Intelligence training programs can learn strategies that will help them strengthen these skills in their children. These strategies include demonstrating and teaching emotional language, creating a safe and supportive environment, and encouraging empathy (Domitrovich *et al.*, 2017).

The importance of Emotional Intelligence is also evident in school life. Research has shown that students with high Emotional Intelligence tend to integrate better into the school environment and have better relationships with their classmates (Brackett *et al.*, 2019). Parents who support the development of Emotional Intelligence in their children help not only with their academic success, but also with their social well-being. In addition, the development of Emotional Intelligence can have long-term benefits. According to Schutte's study *et al.*, (2016), people with high Emotional Intelligence are more likely to have healthy relationships, be happy, and better manage stress and life challenges. When parents invest in the development of their children's Emotional Intelligence, they pave the way for a life full of success and emotional well-being (Saarni, 2017, Mayer & Salovey, 2018).

Parental involvement has been shown to enhance children's Emotional Intelligence by providing a supportive environment that promotes open communication and emotional expression (Garcia, & Martinez, 2019). Emotional Intelligence training can be integrated into the family environment through activities that promote empathy and self-regulation, such as discussions about emotions and family activities (Khan & Ali, 2021). Furthermore, the development of Emotional Intelligence in children is closely linked to their ability to develop social skills, which are enhanced by parental support and guidance (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Family views on the role of school in the development of children's Emotional Intelligence are notable as they believe that school is a place where children can develop social skills, such as cooperation

and communication. Also, many parents consider that teachers play an important role in providing emotional support to children, helping them manage their emotions Zins, J. E., & Elias, M. J. (2017). A portion of families have been observed in research to value programs, lesson plans, and action plans that integrate Emotional Intelligence teaching into the curriculum. The perception that school should provide a safe environment, free from bullying, is also important for parents (Brackett & Rikkers, 2014. Smith & Sharp, 2017).

In conclusion, the development of Emotional Intelligence in children is crucial for their personal and social development. Parents, through their support and education, can play a crucial role in this process. Promoting Emotional Intelligence not only enhances children's well-being, but also has long-term positive effects on all aspects of their adult lives.

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**Cite This Article:** Maria Sakellariou, Mitsi Polyxeni, Strati Panagiota (2025). Views of Families of Kindergarten Students on the Degree of Strengthening Emotional Intelligence through Differentiated Teaching and Learning. *East African Scholars J Edu Humanit Lit*, 8(3), 75-83.

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