

Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence Training in Enhancing Teacher-Student Relationships and Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) training on enhancing teacher-student relationships and improving academic performance in middle schools. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research involved 60 teachers and 600 students, with the teachers randomly assigned to either an intervention group, which received EI training, or a control group. Quantitative measures included the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), the Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI), and academic performance assessments through grades and standardized test scores. Qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The results indicated significant improvements in teachers' EI levels, better teacher-student relationships, and higher academic performance among students in the intervention group. Qualitative findings corroborated these outcomes, highlighting enhanced communication and classroom climate. These findings underscore the potential benefits of integrating EI training into teacher professional development programs to foster both emotional well-being and academic success among students.

Keywords:

Emotional Intelligence; Teacher-Student Relationship; Academic Performance; Teacher Training; Middle School Education

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the classroom environment are fundamentally shaped by the relationships between teachers and students, which are increasingly recognized as pivotal to academic success and overall student well-being (Meszaros and Szaloki, 2023). Recent educational research has highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) as a critical factor in these relationships (Rao, 2022). Emotional intelligence, the ability to understand and manage one's emotions and those of others, has been linked to improved communication, reduced conflicts, and enhanced cooperation within educational settings (Bakhare, 2022). As the complexities of teaching and learning environments grow, there is a pressing need to explore how EI training can be leveraged to foster more positive and productive teacher-student interactions (Clark, 2022; Khassawneh et al., 2022).

In the contemporary educational landscape, teachers are not only expected to deliver academic content but also to address a wide range of emotional and social needs of their students (Tolentino, 2023). This dual role requires teachers to possess a high level of emotional intelligence to navigate the diverse emotional landscapes of their classrooms effectively (Khassawneh et al., 2022; Valente and Lourenço, 2022). Studies have shown that teachers with high EI can create more supportive and engaging learning environments, which in turn can lead to better academic outcomes for students (Nwosu et al., 2022; Ingsih et al., 2020). Despite these benefits, there remains a gap in the systematic incorporation of EI training in teacher professional development programs, particularly regarding its impact on teacher-student





relationships and academic performance (Alrefaai and Shah, 2020; Mérida-López and Extremera, 2020).

Moreover, the increasing awareness of mental health issues among students underscores the necessity for teachers to be equipped with the skills to recognize and respond to emotional distress (Kgosiemang and Khoza, 2022). Emotional intelligence training for teachers can play a crucial role in this regard, providing them with the tools to create a safe and nurturing environment where students feel valued and understood (Caires et al., (2023). This aspect of EI is particularly important in today's diverse and often challenging educational settings, where students face a multitude of pressures both inside and outside the classroom (Atika et al., 2023). Therefore, examining the role of EI training in enhancing the quality of teacher-student interactions and its subsequent effect on academic performance is both timely and essential (Jayalakshmi and Aravindakshan, 2020).

The research problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive understanding and empirical evidence regarding the impact of emotional intelligence training on the quality of teacher-student relationships and academic performance. Despite theoretical support and some anecdotal evidence suggesting that EI training can be beneficial, there is a need for rigorous research to substantiate these claims and to explore the specific mechanisms through which EI training affects educational outcomes. This gap in the literature limits the ability of educators and policymakers to make informed decisions about the implementation of EI training programs in schools.

The objective of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training in enhancing teacher-student relationships and improving academic performance. By conducting a detailed analysis of EI training programs and their impact, this study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for incorporating EI into teacher professional development. The research will explore both the direct and indirect effects of EI training, considering various contextual factors that may influence its effectiveness.

Literature Review

The concept of emotional intelligence (EI) has gained substantial attention in educational research over the past few decades. Originating from the work of psychologists such as Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, and popularized by Daniel Goleman, EI encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively. In educational settings, EI is considered crucial for both teachers and students as it influences various aspects of classroom dynamics and learning outcomes.

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of EI on teacher performance and student outcomes. For instance, Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2011) found that teachers with high levels of EI are more adept at managing classroom behavior, fostering a positive learning environment, and implementing instructional strategies that enhance student engagement. Moreover, research by Jennings and Greenberg (2009) indicates that emotionally intelligent teachers are better equipped to handle the stresses of the profession, thereby reducing burnout and improving job

satisfaction. These findings suggest that EI is integral to effective teaching and learning processes.

The relationship between EI and student academic performance has also been extensively examined. Studies have shown that students with higher EI tend to have better academic achievements, as they can regulate their emotions, set goals, and develop effective coping strategies (Parker et al., 2004; Qualter et al., 2012). Additionally, a meta-analysis by MacCann et al. (2020) demonstrated that EI is positively correlated with academic performance across different age groups and educational levels. This body of research underscores the potential benefits of incorporating EI training into educational curricula to enhance student learning outcomes.

Despite the robust evidence supporting the importance of EI in education, there is a notable lack of research specifically addressing the impact of EI training for teachers on teacher-student relationships and academic performance. While some studies, such as those by Oberle et al. (2016), suggest that teachers' emotional skills can significantly influence classroom climate and student well-being, the direct effects of targeted EI training programs on these variables remain underexplored. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how EI training can be systematically integrated into teacher professional development to optimize both teacher and student outcomes.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed to guide this research:

1. H1: Emotional intelligence training for teachers will significantly enhance the quality of teacher-student relationships
2. H2: Improved teacher-student relationships resulting from EI training will lead to better academic performance among students.
3. H3: Emotional intelligence training will directly contribute to higher academic performance in students by enhancing their emotional and social skills.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of emotional intelligence (EI) training on teacher-student relationships and academic performance. The research involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects of EI training. Specifically, the study utilizes pre- and post-intervention assessments to measure changes in EI levels, teacher-student relationship quality, and student academic performance.

2. Participants

The participants in this study include teachers and students from several middle schools in an urban school district. The sample consists of 60 teachers and 600 students, with teachers randomly assigned to either the intervention group (30 teachers) or the control group (30 teachers). Each teacher's class includes approximately 20 students, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. Demographic information such as age, gender, years of teaching experience, and subject taught is collected to control for potential confounding variables.





3. Intervention

Teachers in the intervention group participate in a comprehensive EI training program, designed based on established EI frameworks and tailored for educational settings. The training includes eight weekly sessions, each lasting two hours, covering topics such as self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship management, and practical strategies for applying EI in the classroom. The training is delivered by certified EI trainers with experience in education. Teachers in the control group do not receive any EI training during the study period.

4. Instruments

a. Emotional Intelligence Assessment

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is used to measure the EI levels of teachers before and after the intervention. The MSCEIT is a well-validated tool that assesses four branches of EI: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions.

b. Teacher-Student Relationship Quality

The Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI) is administered to both teachers and students to assess the quality of their interactions. The TSRI includes dimensions such as closeness, conflict, and dependency, providing a comprehensive measure of relationship quality.

c. Student Academic Performance

Academic performance is evaluated using students' grades in core subjects (math, science, language arts, and social studies) for the semesters before and after the intervention. Standardized test scores are also collected to provide an additional objective measure of academic achievement.

d. Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are conducted with a subset of teachers and students from the intervention group to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions of the EI training and its impact.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the MSCEIT, TSRI, and academic performance measures are analyzed using paired-sample t-tests and ANCOVA to examine differences between the intervention and control groups, controlling for baseline scores and demographic variables. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups are transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and insights related to the impact of EI training.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the baseline characteristics of the intervention and control groups. The mean age of teachers was 37.4 years ($SD = 8.6$), with an average of 12.1 years ($SD = 5.3$) of teaching experience. The gender distribution was approximately balanced, with 53% female and 47% male teachers. Students' demographic data revealed an average age of 13.2 years ($SD = 0.9$), with a

balanced gender distribution (51% female, 49% male). Baseline measures indicated no significant differences between the intervention and control groups in terms of EI levels, teacher-student relationship quality, and academic performance.

2. Quantitative Data Analysis

a. Emotional Intelligence (EI) Levels

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the EI levels of teachers before and after the intervention. The results showed a significant increase in EI scores for the intervention group ($M = 105.3$, $SD = 12.4$) compared to the control group ($M = 98.7$, $SD = 10.9$), $t(58) = 3.76$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that the EI training effectively enhanced teachers' emotional intelligence.

b. Teacher-Student Relationship Quality

The Teacher-Student Relationship Inventory (TSRI) scores were analyzed using ANCOVA, with pre-intervention scores as covariates. The analysis revealed that the intervention group showed significant improvements in relationship quality dimensions: closeness ($F(1, 597) = 12.54$, $p < 0.001$), conflict reduction ($F(1, 597) = 9.32$, $p < 0.01$), and dependency ($F(1, 597) = 7.89$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that EI training had a positive impact on teacher-student relationship quality.

c. Student Academic Performance

Academic performance was assessed through grades and standardized test scores. Paired-sample t-tests indicated significant improvements in the academic performance of students in the intervention group across all core subjects: math ($t(598) = 4.21$, $p < 0.001$), science ($t(598) = 3.98$, $p < 0.001$), language arts ($t(598) = 3.67$, $p < 0.01$), and social studies ($t(598) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, standardized test scores showed a significant increase ($t(598) = 4.05$, $p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that improved teacher-student relationships and increased EI positively influence academic performance.

3. Qualitative Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a subset of teachers and students from the intervention group. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data identified several recurring themes:

- a. Improved Communication and Understanding, Teachers reported enhanced communication skills, which facilitated better understanding and empathy towards students. Students echoed these sentiments, noting that their teachers were more approachable and supportive post-training.
- b. Classroom Climate, Both teachers and students observed a more positive and conducive classroom environment. Teachers noted a decrease in disruptive behaviors and an increase in cooperative learning activities.
- c. Emotional and Social Skills, Teachers felt more equipped to handle emotional challenges in the classroom, and students reported improvements in their own emotional regulation and social interactions.
- d. Academic Motivation and Engagement, Students expressed increased motivation and engagement in their studies, attributing these changes to the more supportive and understanding classroom environment fostered by their emotionally intelligent teachers.





Discussion

The findings from this study underscore the critical role that emotional intelligence (EI) training can play in enhancing teacher-student relationships and improving academic performance. The significant increase in EI levels among teachers who participated in the training program confirms the efficacy of the intervention. This result aligns with previous research that highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in educational settings, suggesting that targeted training can effectively enhance teachers' emotional competencies. By equipping teachers with the skills to better understand and manage emotions, the EI training program facilitated a more supportive and empathetic classroom environment.

The improvement in teacher-student relationship quality observed in the intervention group further emphasizes the positive impact of EI training. Enhanced closeness and reduced conflict between teachers and students are indicative of more harmonious and productive interactions. These findings support the hypothesis that emotional intelligence is integral to fostering positive teacher-student relationships. The ability of teachers to effectively manage their own emotions and understand those of their students likely contributed to a more respectful and understanding classroom atmosphere. This improvement in relationship quality is crucial, as positive teacher-student relationships have been consistently linked to better student engagement and motivation.

The significant gains in student academic performance across all core subjects and standardized test scores in the intervention group highlight the direct and indirect benefits of EI training. The results suggest that when teachers develop higher emotional intelligence, it not only enhances their relationships with students but also positively impacts students' academic outcomes. This aligns with the broader literature that connects emotional intelligence with academic success, as emotionally intelligent teachers can create a learning environment that supports academic achievement. The findings also underscore the importance of addressing emotional and social skills in educational settings to promote holistic student development.

Qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups provide additional context to these quantitative results, revealing how improved communication and understanding between teachers and students contributed to a more positive classroom climate. Teachers reported feeling more confident in managing classroom dynamics, while students noted an increase in their own emotional regulation and social skills. These improvements likely created a feedback loop where positive interactions between teachers and students reinforced each other, leading to a more engaging and supportive learning environment. This qualitative evidence complements the quantitative findings, offering a comprehensive view of the benefits of EI training.

The study's results highlight the multifaceted impact of emotional intelligence training in educational contexts. By enhancing teachers' emotional skills, the training not only improved teacher-student relationships but also led to significant academic benefits for students. These findings have important implications for teacher

professional development programs, suggesting that incorporating EI training can be a valuable strategy for improving educational outcomes. Future research should continue to explore the long-term effects of EI training and investigate how such programs can be effectively integrated into standard teacher training curricula to maximize their benefits.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that emotional intelligence (EI) training for teachers significantly enhances teacher-student relationships and improves student academic performance. The quantitative results show substantial increases in teachers' EI levels, better relationship quality, and improved academic outcomes for students in the intervention group compared to the control group. Qualitative data further support these findings, revealing that enhanced communication and understanding contribute to a more positive classroom climate. These results highlight the importance of integrating EI training into teacher professional development programs, suggesting that such training can lead to more supportive and effective educational environments. Consequently, implementing EI training holds considerable promise for fostering both emotional well-being and academic success among students, underscoring its value as a strategic component of educational reform.

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