Exploring Emotional Intelligence among the Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract

Education is the overall development of students' personalities. The teachers play a vital role in achieving their goal. Emotionally intelligent (EI) teachers facilitate their students' motivation, performance, innovation, teamwork, improved leadership qualities, and effective time use. Successful teachers are those who can manage their negative feelings authentically, honestly, and healthily. The present study was conducted to investigate the EI of a random sample of 240 secondary school teachers in Pudukkottai district. For this study, the investigator constructed the EI scale, which has been used to measure emotional intelligence. The collected data were analysed using the *t*-test. Results revealed that teachers demonstrated moderate levels of EI overall. No significant differences in EI were found by gender, school management type, school locale, or teaching discipline. The results of this study revealed that male and female teachers lack only one specific EI area: they always think about their home problems at work.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotional competency, teachers, secondary education

Introduction

According to Chopra and Kanji (2010), emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to sense, understand, and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information, connection, and influence. The importance of knowledge in a company's competitiveness is increasingly recognised. In a "knowledge economy," effective sharing and application of knowledge are essential for success. This process relies on emotional intelligence, as employees need motivation, collaboration skills, and trust in their environment, including their managers and organisation. Emotionally intelligent leaders play a crucial role by matching the right people to the right jobs and supporting their development, thus fostering growth and creating a more emotionally aware organisation. Research from the 1990s revealed that school performance accounted for only 18% of future leaders' success, while EI and related abilities accounted for the remaining 82%. These abilities, such as relationship building, empathy, self-awareness, self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation, significantly affect personal and professional lives. Trust, collaboration, and a positive attitude toward work and change are vital for success and rooted in emotions. Thus, emotional management is a key skill for leaders. It is essential to prepare future leaders in these competencies. In my article, I will discuss the emotional competencies that enhance professional performance and provide an overview of the foundational theories of EI and the key abilities necessary for effective leadership (Stuart & Paquet, 2001). EI helps reverse the tide of educational ineffectiveness, thereby strengthening the whole process (Villegas et al., 2016). Nurturing of EI among the teachers, therefore, becomes a prime concern. Emotionally intelligent teachers can produce emotionally intelligent citizens, asserts (Paul & Thavaraj, 2015). In the workplace, EI involves the capacity to perceive, express, understand, and manage emotions professionally (Palmer et al., 2001). EI has been recognized as important for workplace success (Subrahmanyam,

2018; Westover, 2025), leading to calls to incorporate EI skills into university curricula (Ming Chia, 2005; Palmer et al., 2001), as EI has recently emerged as a key construct in modern psychological research. EI refers to the competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thoughts, and regulate both positive and negative emotions in oneself and others (Matthews et al., 2006). Teachers with qualities such as self-awareness, self-motivation, empathy, emotional stability, and strong relationship management skills can inspire their students. These ideal educators not only address academic needs but also understand the emotional, social, and personal challenges that their students face. Teachers who find satisfaction in their work often have a positive impact on their students' lives. EI gained popularity as a key psychological construct in this field (Bhoumick, 2018). It focuses on the impact of emotions on an individual's success in personal and professional settings. Although the term was first used by Marin et al. (2019). Goleman played a significant role in popularising it. EI research spans various fields, including management and psychology, primarily in Western countries, and recent studies have examined its validity across cultural contexts. Teaching is one of the most influential professions in society. The importance of teachers in a country's educational program is too great. A teacher, through teaching, not only shapes students but also shapes the behaviour of human beings, society, and the Nation. The teacher is called the 'architect of the Nation, the maker of man, and the maker of history. No educational program can be successful without proper teaching by the teacher. An emotionally intelligent teacher is the heart and soul of a successful educational program (Dixit, 2023). A teacher is a mechanism that brings about positive social and behavioral change in students by presenting them with a model of behavior. EI plays an important role in this mysterious, magical process of person-building. The success of a teacher motivating students and students being motivated, learning in a happy psycho-social condition, soothing irritant conflicts with a smiling face, subduing anger that pains students, and the teacher

being proportionate to the caliber to handle EI. Apart from designing and implementing the curriculum, there is a need for an emotionally intelligent teacher who can sense even subtle person- and class-specific changes and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. This is a herculean task, as the workload of a teacher never exhausts itself; it continues to pile up, even after being cleared up now and then. The workaholic mindset of individuals and the organization, aiming at economic and social prosperity, demands that a teacher be emotionally intelligent so that students are not affected but still imbibe positive characteristics and develop their holistic personalities.

Despite the recognized importance of teacher EI, limited research has examined EI among secondary school teachers in rural Indian contexts. The present study addresses this gap by investigating EI levels among secondary school teachers in Pudukkottai District, Tamil Nadu.

Emotional Intelligence

Although the official definition of EI originated in 1990, Thorndike introduced the term social intelligence in 1920, distinguishing it from both abstract and practical intelligence. He considered that these abilities influence the success of our social relations and help us to understand and interpret other people's behaviour. The term was later frequently used. All authors of these publications emphasized the outstanding role of emotions (Stuart & Paquet, 2001). Later, Salovey & Mayer (1990) used the term "social intelligence" to develop their theory. What do we mean by "emotion"? This term refers to a variety of experiences and characteristics, often categorised in a manner that is widely understood, yet somewhat ambiguous. Emotion includes a person's affect, mood, or immediate feelings, which can vary independently. Dispositional affect describes an individual's overall emotional orientation, whether positive or negative (Smith & Lazarus, 1990). Watson and Clark (1984) suggested that it underlies consciousness. A.A. Milne's character Eeyore exemplifies a depressive dispositional affect, maintaining a consistently gloomy outlook.

Emotions, derived from the Latin word "emovare," meaning "to move and change" (Callahan & McCollum, 2002), are crucial to human evolution and adaptation. EI is a complex concept that lacks a universally accepted definition, resulting in multiple interpretations. Different scholars have described EI in various ways: Westover (2025) regarded it as a skill, while Mayer and Caruso (2025) considered it an aptitude. In contrast, Roberts et al. (2001) proposed that it encompasses both skill and aptitude. Theories on EI fall into two main categories. The "purist" perspective, as advocated by (1990), views EI as an ability comparable to other forms of intelligence. They define EI as "the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions, and to effectively manage emotions to foster personal growth" (Mayer & Caruso, 2025). In contrast, the mixed model, supported by Bar-On and Goleman, includes emotional processing alongside personality traits such as optimism.

Currently, mixed models are the most widely used in practical applications. The term "EI" was first used by Wayne Payne in 1986 (Sfetcu, 2020) in his doctoral thesis, "A Study of Emotion: Developing EI; Self-Integration, Relating to Fear, Pain, and Desire." Payne explored the nature of emotions and identified "emotional ignorance" as a factor contributing to societal issues like depression and addiction. Recognizing the absence of educational resources on EI, he laid the groundwork for future research in the field. In his dissertation, he aimed to create a guidebook to help individuals develop their EI. It significantly influences how we perceive and react to our environment and is essential for personal growth. Researchers have identified EI as a key factor in understanding and managing emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This concept helps explain why individuals with the same IQ can achieve different levels of success; often, it is because they can connect socially and emotionally rather than relying solely on their intellect (St et al., 2011).

Concepts and Theories

Numerous authors have made significant contributions to the study of EI. Due to the extensive nature of this scholarship, we will focus on three key models in greater depth to better understand what EI entails (Spielberger, 2004). The first model is Salovey-Mayer's, which defines EI as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and utilize emotions to enhance thinking. This model is assessed using a capacity-based measure. The second is Goleman's model, which views EI as a set of skills and competencies that influence leadership performance. This model is evaluated through a multi-rated assessment. Finally, the Bar-On model describes a range of interconnected emotional and social capabilities, skills, and facilitators that impact intelligent behavior. This model is measured using self-report questionnaires.

Perspective of EI

EI in India is closely linked to social values, religious traditions, and cultural practices. Individual preferences relate to duty or dharma, fostering a morality that emphasises caring for others and sensitivity in relationships. Traditions highlight the link between stress and suffering, suggesting that a meaningful life involves positive emotions. Consequently, many researchers in various nations have defined EI, recognising its importance for personal and societal growth. Bhoir and Suri (2019) define Emotional Intelligence as three key dimensions: emotional sensitivity, emotional maturity, and emotional competency. These dimensions help individuals recognise, interpret, and manage the complexities of human behaviour. Chauhan (2016) describes Emotional Intelligence from a Vedic Psychology perspective as the transformation of the mind, body, and spirit to unlock our true potential for universal well-being and joy. Rathore et al. (2021) emphasise that intelligence has an emotional basis, using emotions as a source of energy to achieve goals. Villegas et al. (2016) view EI as a journey from mistrust to trust, from self-doubt to self-empowerment, and from despair to hope.

Review of the Related Literature

Chauhan (2016) noted that globalisation has heightened competition among nations, pushing employees to exhibit innovative behaviour and exceed performance expectations. He argued that developing nations can compete with developed countries in the service sector if they keep up with technological advancements and skill upgrades. Additionally, Kabore emphasised the importance of managing emotions in uncertain environments, highlighting that EI is crucial for navigating ambiguity and pressure. His study showed that EI significantly enhances decision-making, making it a vital component in organisational contexts. Kabore's work underscores the need to incorporate EI into professional development to improve decision-making at both the individual and organisational levels.

Maharana and Rathod (2013) found that emotional intelligence, as measured by the emotional intelligence test developed and standardized by Hyde and Pethe (2001), was applied to 100 secondary school teachers. Researchers found that, based on gender and experience, all participants have the same level of emotional intelligence. To develop emotional intelligence, the authors suggested an emotional intelligence programme and workshops.

Marin et al. (2019) explored the roots of emotional intelligence by analysing the etymology of "emotion," derived from the Latin verb emovere, meaning "to move, to change." The researchers highlighted the crucial role of emotions in human adaptation and survival, as they shape our perceptions of the environment. This laid the groundwork for studying emotional abilities. By placing emotional intelligence in its historical and theoretical context, this study enhanced our understanding of its origins and provided a framework for future measurement and application.

Villegas et al. (2016) studied the relationship between emotional intelligence and reasoning abilities among 724 higher secondary students in Puducherry. The findings included significant differences in reasoning abilities between male and female students; gender differences in emotional intelligence, particularly in intrapersonal awareness; variations in reasoning ability among students from government, aided, and unaided schools; and differences in EI dimensions by school type, particularly in intrapersonal and interpersonal awareness and management. The study also identified a positive relationship between science reasoning ability and EI, underscoring the importance of EI for academic performance and problem-solving.

Chopra and Kanji (2010) emphasized that EI, a concept that has existed for centuries, has gained significant academic and professional recognition over the last two decades. It is increasingly seen as a crucial competency in fields such as leadership, teamwork, and communication. In today's interconnected global economy,

future leaders must not only demonstrate EI but also cultivate it in others. Despite its importance, there is ongoing debate over the best methods for measuring EI. To address this, Kabore proposed a holistic modeling approach that includes developing a latent-variable structural equation model to construct an EI index at the individual level. This index serves as a diagnostic tool to identify strengths and weaknesses in EI competencies, offering insights for improvement. Kabore's work aims to provide a more comprehensive, empirically grounded framework for measuring EI that addresses limitations in earlier methods.

Roberts et al. (2001) examined EI measurement and suggested that performance-based assessments may better distinguish EI from personality than self-report measures. Using the Multi-Factor EI Scale (Brackett & Salovey, 2006) with 704 participants, the study also included assessments of personality (Trait Self-Description Inventory) and intelligence (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery). The findings indicated that EI showed convergent validity with intelligence and divergent validity from personality traits. However, differing scoring methods (expert versus consensus) yielded contradictory outcomes, prompting concerns about the measurement of EI, as well as the factor structure and subscale reliability. The researcher's review emphasises the ongoing challenges in developing reliable measurement tools for EI and highlights the need for methodological enhancements to differentiate it from related psychological constructs.

Stuart and Paquet (2001) highlighted the crucial role of EI in effective leadership, arguing that it comprises abilities essential for a leader's success in organizations. The researcher observed that leaders who cultivate competencies like motivation, flexibility, and trust are more likely to foster well-functioning organizations with satisfied employees. Additionally, the researcher noted that emotionally intelligent leadership allows organizations to adapt quickly to changes, making EI a vital resource for maintaining competitiveness. This work underscores the importance of EI in leadership studies, aligning with research that connects emotional competencies to organizational performance and employee well-being.

Significance of the Study

Adolescence is a crucial period in a person's life. Given the age of children in secondary school, teachers should not only be intellectually but also emotionally astute. The involvement of a secondary school teacher in his job is very important for the overall development of students. We are in a time when our prospects for the future increasingly depend on managing ourselves and our relationships more artfully. Even people with high intelligence cannot always be successful. Grades at school or a high IQ cannot predict with certainty who will be successful in real life and who will not. So, it is necessary to assess the teacher's EI.

Objectives

1. To assess the level of EI among secondary school teachers.
2. To examine whether a significant difference exists in the EI of secondary intelligence based on gender (male vs. female).
3. To examine whether a significant difference exists in the EI of teachers based on the type of school management (government vs private).
4. To examine whether a significant difference exists in the EI of secondary schools based on the school locale (rural vs. urban).
5. To examine whether a significant difference exists in the EI of secondary schools based on teaching discipline (art vs. science).

Hypotheses

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers formulated four null hypotheses, which are as follows:
1. There is no significant difference between male and female secondary school teachers in their EI.
2. There is no significant difference between government and private secondary school teachers in their EI.
3. There is no significant difference between rural and urban secondary school teachers in their EI.
4. There is no significant difference in the EI of secondary school teachers in arts and science subjects.

Methodology

Design

The present study employed a descriptive survey method to investigate EI among secondary school teachers in Pudukkottai district, Tamil Nadu.

Population and Sample

The population for the present study consisted of secondary school teachers who are working in the Pudukkottai district. The investigator has used the simple random sampling technique for selecting the sample from the population. The Pudukkottai district (n.d.) official website states there are a total of 129 secondary schools, of which 13 are government-aided and only six are private unaided secondary schools. The sample consisted of 240 secondary school teachers in Pudukkottai district. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the district had 20 secondary schools. In total, all the schools in the Pudukottai district had 1200 teachers. Hence, the investigator has selected 5% of the population as the sample for the present study. The 5% sample is about 240 teachers.

Tool

The researchers used a standardized tool, the "EI" Chopra and Kanji (2010), and the statements and dimensions were suitable for secondary school teachers. This value revealed that the tool has high alpha scores. The statements mainly focus on secondary school teachers' EI and its utilisation in classroom practice.

The questionnaire was administered to 240 teachers working in the secondary schools of Pudukkottai district. The researcher briefed the teachers on the study's purpose and provided clear instructions for answering the questions. The tool consisted of a five-point Likert scale (*Strongly agree* = 5, *Agree* = 4, *Undecided* = 3, *Disagree* = 2, *Strongly disagree* = 1). Possible scores ranged from 25 to 125. Cronbach's Alpha was used to find out the tool's reliability. It is the value 0.849.

Results

The collected data were tabulated, and the mean and standard deviation were calculated for the total sample and the sub-samples. The differences between the mean scores of subgroups were tested for significance by finding the *t*-value. The results of the significance test were presented in the tables. The mean score for the total sample is 80.05, and the standard deviation is 6.26, which is higher than the midpoint of the scale (67.5). It indicates that the selected samples have a slightly above-average level of EI, but it is not much higher, as the obtained mean score is well below the maximum score of 125.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Intelligence Scores

Statistic	Value
M	80.05
SD	6.26
Mdn	80.00

Note. N = 240.

Comparing subgroups helps identify the variable that shows significant differences. The sub-group variables were gender, school management type, school locale, and teaching discipline category. Gender was taken as male and female. Type of school management considered government and aided schools. Locale was urban and rural. The categories of teaching discipline considered were arts subject students and science subject students. Calculated t-value 3.16 is greater than the table value at 5% level of significance. Hence, there exists no significant difference in EI between male and female school teachers. Male teachers' EI is slightly higher than that of female teachers.

Calculated *t*-value 1.17 is less than the table value at 5% level of significance, hence there exists no significant difference in EI between government and private secondary school teachers.

Calculated t-value 0.03 is less than the table value at 5% level of significance, hence there exists no significant difference in the locale of the school and EI of their working secondary school teachers.

Calculated t-value 0.84 is less than the table value at 5% level of significance, hence there exists no significant difference in EI between arts and science subject teaching teachers.

Table 2
Comparison of Emotional Intelligence Across Subgroups

Group	Sub-group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value	*p*-value	Significance
Gender	Female	120	78.79	6.08	3.16	0.002	NS
	Male	120	81.30	6.23			
Type of school management	Government	120	80.53	6.35	1.17	0.243	NS
	Private	120	79.58	6.15			
Locale of the school	Urban	120	80.07	6.74	0.03	0.976	NS
	Rural	120	80.04	5.76			
Category of teaching discipline	Arts	79	80.49	5.11	0.84	0.402	NS
	Science	161	79.84	6.75			

Note. N = 240. Level of significance = .05. NS = not significant.

Discussion

The present study investigated emotional intelligence among secondary school teachers in Pudukkottai District, India. The findings revealed moderate overall emotional intelligence levels (*M* = 80.05), suggesting room for improvement in teachers' emotional competencies. This aligns with Chopra and Kanji (2010), who emphasized emotional intelligence as a catalyst for professional excellence and leadership.

Contrary to expectations, male teachers (*M* = 81.30) scored significantly higher than female teachers (*M* = 78.79, *t* = 3.16, *p* < .05). This finding differs from Maharana and Rathod (2013), who reported no gender differences in emotional intelligence among secondary school teachers in Madhya Pradesh. However, the present result supports Villegas et al. (2016), who found gender differences in emotional intelligence dimensions among Indian students, suggesting cultural factors may influence emotional expression patterns.

Item-level analysis revealed that female teachers struggled more with work-home boundary management, consistently thinking about home problems at the workplace. This finding resonates with Roberts et al. (2001), who reported that female teachers experience greater stress than their male counterparts. The result may reflect traditional gender role expectations in Indian society, where women bear disproportionate domestic responsibilities alongside professional duties (Rathore et al., 2021).

No significant differences emerged based on school type, locale, or teaching discipline, suggesting that organizational and contextual factors may matter less than individual characteristics in shaping teacher emotional intelligence. These non-significant findings align with Stuart and Paquet (2001), who emphasized that emotional intelligence comprises personal competencies essential for success regardless of environmental factors.

The moderate levels of emotional intelligence observed underscore the need for targeted interventions, as emotionally intelligent teachers better facilitate student motivation, performance, and holistic development (Paul & Thavaraj, 2015). As Dixit (2015) noted, emotionally intelligent teachers are the heart and soul of successful educational programs.

Conclusion

Introducing emotions in schools would be a radical change. Yet schools do not change so readily. Those well-meaning people who have tried to introduce innovations in schools have encountered considerable resistance from teachers, students, and parents alike. Without their active participation, no such far-reaching change is possible. The findings indicate that the emotional intelligence of secondary school teachers in the Pudukkottai district is moderate. They should be sublimated through constructive activities. Therefore, work ethics, balanced work and healthy living must be stressed in the curriculum. Emotions should be directed towards a good object or healthy ideas. Such direction and concentration can lead to the development of qualities such as justice, patriotism, and moral qualities.

AI Use Statement

The authors used Grammarly and ChatGPT for grammar checking, improving sentence clarity, and language improvement. The author reviewed and edited the output and takes full responsibility for the final content.

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