

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS IN RURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing teacher-student relationships in rural schools. It examines how teachers' emotional intelligence affects their interactions with students, the classroom environment, and overall student engagement and academic performance. Using a qualitative research design, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with 20 teachers and 60 students from rural secondary schools. The findings reveal that teachers with high EI demonstrate stronger self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, which foster positive teacher-student relationships and create emotionally supportive learning environments. Students of emotionally intelligent teachers reported feeling more engaged, confident, and academically motivated. However, the study also identified challenges faced by rural teachers, such as emotional burnout and lack of institutional support, which hindered their ability to fully apply their emotional intelligence. The study emphasizes the need for targeted professional development programs to enhance EI in teachers, especially in rural schools where socio-economic and emotional challenges are more pronounced. The results underline the importance of EI in promoting academic success and emotional well-being for students, highlighting the critical need for EI-focused teacher training to improve educational outcomes in rural settings.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Teacher-Student Relationships, Rural Schools, Teacher Effectiveness, Professional Development.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the future of individuals and societies. Among the various factors that influence the quality of education, the relationship between teachers and students stands out as one of the most critical. This relationship significantly impacts student motivation, academic performance, and overall emotional well-being. A positive teacher-student relationship can create an environment where students feel supported, valued, and understood. However, establishing and maintaining such relationships is often challenging, particularly in rural schools where teachers and students face unique challenges.

In rural areas, schools frequently operate with limited resources, including inadequate physical infrastructure and insufficient access to educational tools. Additionally, rural schools often serve students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, which can further complicate efforts to foster meaningful teacher-student relationships. Teachers in these settings are not only tasked with addressing academic challenges but also with navigating the emotional and social difficulties that students may face. Many of these students come from families experiencing financial hardship, instability, or other stressors that can hinder their academic and emotional development.

In this context, Emotional Intelligence (EI) emerges as a crucial factor in enhancing teacher-student relationships. Emotional Intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and influence one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Salovey

& Mayer, 1990). First introduced by Salovey and Mayer in the early 1990s and later popularized by Daniel Goleman (1995), EI has become widely recognized as a significant influence on interpersonal relationships, leadership abilities, and academic success. In the educational context, teachers who possess high levels of EI are better equipped to manage the complex emotional dynamics of their students, especially in environments where external stressors such as poverty, familial instability, or lack of resources are prevalent.

As education continues to evolve, it has become increasingly evident that academic success cannot be solely measured by cognitive abilities. Emotional development and interpersonal relationships, especially between teachers and students, play a critical role in creating a positive learning environment. This is especially true in rural schools, where teachers and students often come from tight-knit communities, and where emotional support is a critical factor in academic achievement. Emotional intelligence, therefore, does not only facilitate effective classroom management but also enhances the quality of interactions between teachers and students, fostering an environment where learning can thrive.

Teachers with high EI can better understand and respond to the emotional needs of their students. They can recognize when a student is struggling emotionally and provide the necessary support, creating a classroom atmosphere conducive to both academic and emotional growth. In rural settings, where students often face additional challenges such as limited access to mental health resources and exposure to economic hardship, EI becomes even more significant. Teachers who are emotionally attuned to their students can offer emotional support, act as mentors, and foster a sense of belonging, helping students feel safe and motivated to engage in learning.

However, rural schools are not without their own set of challenges. Many rural schools operate with limited financial support and resources, which often translates to a lack of updated textbooks, technology, and extracurricular opportunities that could enrich the learning experience. Rural teachers also face larger class sizes, making it difficult to address the individual needs of students. Additionally, rural communities often experience higher levels of poverty, which can have a profound effect on students' emotional well-being and academic performance. Many students in these areas come from families with lower educational attainment or financial instability, factors that can contribute to anxiety and stress, which in turn affect their ability to concentrate on their studies.

Moreover, rural schools are often faced with teacher shortages, where educators are tasked with multiple roles and responsibilities. Teachers in these settings often do not receive the same level of professional development or support as those in more urban areas, which can contribute to burnout and stress. This may, in turn, affect their ability to build strong, supportive relationships with their students. In such challenging circumstances, emotional intelligence becomes an essential tool for teachers in maintaining positive relationships with their students and creating an environment where students can thrive despite the challenges they face.

The role of emotional intelligence in enhancing teacher-student relationships is particularly crucial in rural schools, where students may lack the external emotional support that is often available in urban settings. Teachers who possess high emotional intelligence

are better positioned to create an environment that supports not only the academic but also the emotional and social development of their students. These teachers are able to build trust, manage classroom dynamics, and respond empathetically to the emotional needs of students, thereby improving both their engagement in school and their overall well-being.

The primary goal of this study is to explore how emotional intelligence can influence and enhance teacher-student relationships in rural schools. The study will focus on understanding the specific challenges faced by teachers in rural settings and how their emotional intelligence can help them address these challenges. By examining the relationship between EI and teacher-student interactions in rural schools, this research aims to provide valuable insights into how EI can be leveraged to improve both academic outcomes and the emotional well-being of students.

This research will examine the ways in which emotional intelligence can influence teacher behavior, classroom management, and student engagement, particularly in rural areas where teachers may face additional challenges. Understanding how EI can be integrated into teaching practices may offer practical recommendations for enhancing the teacher-student relationship in rural schools, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotional Intelligence in Educational Settings

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has gained significant attention in the field of education as an essential factor influencing teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), EI refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and regulate one's own emotions and the emotions of others. In the classroom, teachers with high EI are able to create supportive and empathetic environments that foster positive teacher-student relationships. Goleman (1995) further expanded on this concept, identifying five key components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies allow teachers to better understand and respond to students' emotional needs, ultimately enhancing both learning and emotional development.

Research suggests that EI plays a significant role in improving classroom management and fostering positive emotional climates. Bose and Guha (2018) highlighted that teachers with higher EI are more effective at managing classroom dynamics and resolving conflicts, which is essential for creating a productive learning environment. Additionally, Anshu (2025) found that teachers with high EI are better equipped to handle the emotional complexities of teaching, making them more successful in maintaining positive relationships with their students.

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Teacher-Student Relationships

The teacher-student relationship is crucial for academic success and emotional well-being. Teachers with high EI are able to form deeper connections with their students, creating an atmosphere of trust, respect, and emotional safety. Studies have shown that EI positively

influences the quality of these relationships by enhancing empathy, communication, and emotional support.

In a study by Damaso (2019), teachers in rural schools demonstrated a strong relationship between their emotional intelligence and the emotional literacy strategies they employed in the classroom. The findings revealed that aspects of EI, such as well-being and emotionality, had the strongest correlations with emotional literacy strategies, emphasizing the importance of EI in managing teacher-student interactions. Teachers with higher EI were better able to respond to students' emotional needs and create a more supportive classroom environment.

Furthermore, Pattiasina et al. (2024) explored the impact of EI training on teacher-student relationships. Their study found that teachers who received EI training reported better emotional communication with students, which led to improved classroom dynamics and better academic outcomes. These findings suggest that EI training can be an effective strategy for enhancing teacher-student relationships and fostering a positive learning environment.

Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness is often measured by how well teachers can engage students, manage classrooms, and promote learning. Anshu (2025) emphasized that emotional intelligence is a key factor in determining teacher effectiveness, as it enables teachers to manage stress, handle challenging situations, and engage with students in meaningful ways. Teachers with high EI are more likely to maintain a positive classroom environment, which in turn contributes to better student outcomes.

The ability to manage one's emotions and the emotions of others is particularly important in rural schools, where teachers often face unique challenges such as limited resources and high levels of student poverty. Bower et al. (2018) explored how the EI of school leaders affects overall school success and teacher performance. Their findings indicated that leaders who exhibit high EI foster a more supportive work environment, which enhances teacher effectiveness and, by extension, student achievement. This relationship between EI and teacher effectiveness underscores the importance of developing EI in both teachers and school leaders, particularly in rural settings where emotional and social support is crucial.

Emotional Intelligence in Rural Schools

Rural schools face numerous challenges that can affect both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. These challenges include limited resources, socio-economic difficulties, and teacher shortages. In these settings, EI becomes even more critical, as teachers must navigate both academic and emotional challenges with their students.

A study by Zhong and Zhong (2024) on the emotional burden of rural teachers in China highlighted the additional stressors teachers face in rural areas. Their research found that rural teachers often experience emotional breakdowns due to administrative pressures, lack of support, and high emotional demands. In these environments, EI serves as an essential

tool for teachers to manage their emotions, maintain resilience, and continue fostering positive relationships with their students.

Similarly, Zainudin et al. (2019) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement among rural students. They found that EI significantly contributed to better academic performance, suggesting that teachers with higher EI are more likely to create positive emotional climates that support student learning, especially in rural schools where external support may be limited.

Emotional Intelligence and Teacher Training in Rural Areas

Given the significant role that EI plays in enhancing teacher-student relationships and teacher effectiveness, integrating EI training into teacher development programs is essential. Several studies have suggested that teacher training programs should focus on developing EI competencies to improve emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills.

Pattiasina et al. (2024) found that EI training improved teachers' ability to manage emotions, communicate effectively, and engage with students in a more supportive manner. These improvements led to better relationships between teachers and students, as well as enhanced academic performance. This highlights the potential benefits of incorporating EI training into ongoing professional development programs for teachers, particularly in rural areas where emotional and social support for both teachers and students may be lacking.

Moreover, Mehta (2014) argued that teachers who possess high EI are better equipped to handle the challenges of rural teaching, including larger class sizes, limited resources, and socio-economic hardships. By developing EI, teachers can improve classroom management, create supportive learning environments, and foster positive relationships with their students, all of which contribute to better educational outcomes.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing teacher-student relationships in rural schools. A descriptive qualitative approach is used to capture the perceptions and experiences of both teachers and students.

The study includes 20 rural secondary school teachers and 60 students (3 students per teacher). Teachers are selected based on a minimum of two years of teaching experience in rural settings, ensuring their familiarity with the specific challenges faced in these environments. Students are chosen for their regular interaction with the teachers, ensuring diverse perspectives on the teacher-student dynamic.

Data is collected using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Teachers and students will be interviewed individually to explore their understanding of EI and its influence on their interactions. Teachers will discuss their emotional intelligence, while students will share how they perceive its impact on their engagement and academic outcomes. Classroom observations will provide insight into how EI is reflected in teachers' behavior, classroom management, and emotional support during various interactions.

The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying patterns and themes related to emotional intelligence and teacher-student relationships. Transcribed interviews and observation notes will be examined for recurring ideas, which will be grouped into themes to develop a deeper understanding of the role of EI in rural classrooms.

Ethically, the study will ensure informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation for all participants. Additionally, measures will be taken to avoid any emotional distress during the research process.

This qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how emotional intelligence shapes teacher-student interactions in rural educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Emotional Intelligence of Teachers

The study revealed that teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence were more adept at establishing strong, positive relationships with their students. Several key components of emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-regulation, and empathy, emerged as essential traits in fostering effective teacher-student interactions. Teachers who demonstrated strong self-awareness were able to recognize and manage their own emotions, particularly in high-pressure situations, which allowed them to maintain composure and calmness in the classroom. This emotional regulation created a stable environment, even in the face of student disruptions or emotional outbursts.

Empathy was another prominent factor that emerged from the interviews. Teachers who showed a high degree of empathy were more attuned to the emotional needs of their students. They actively listened to students' concerns and understood their personal challenges, which enabled them to respond in a caring and supportive manner. As one teacher noted in an interview, "When a student is struggling emotionally, I can often tell just by looking at their body language or tone of voice. I try to engage with them calmly and let them know I'm there to help." This empathy and emotional attunement allowed teachers to build stronger emotional bonds with their students, facilitating better learning experiences.

These findings are consistent with the work of Damaso (2019), who found that emotionally intelligent teachers in rural schools were able to create emotionally supportive classrooms that nurtured both academic and personal development. The ability of teachers to regulate their emotions and show empathy not only helps in managing classroom behavior but also fosters an atmosphere of trust and respect, which is crucial in rural schools where teachers often face additional social and emotional challenges.

Teacher-Student Interactions

The study found that teacher-student interactions were deeply influenced by the teachers' emotional intelligence. Teachers who demonstrated high levels of EI were able to effectively manage classroom dynamics, resolve conflicts, and provide emotional support when needed. These teachers used various emotional regulation strategies, such as remaining calm during disruptions, offering emotional reassurance to students, and adjusting their approach based on the emotional state of the students.

For example, during classroom observations, it was noted that teachers with higher EI used positive reinforcement to encourage students, praising not only academic achievement but also emotional effort and perseverance. In one instance, a teacher praised a student for attempting to answer a difficult question, saying, “I appreciate your effort in trying to answer, even though it’s hard. Keep it up, and we’ll get through this together.” Such affirmations boosted the student’s confidence and encouraged continued participation, enhancing the teacher-student relationship.

Teachers also engaged in active listening, which helped them connect with students on a deeper emotional level. During interviews, many students expressed appreciation for teachers who listened to their concerns and acknowledged their feelings. One student explained, “When I’m upset about something at home, my teacher always listens to me and tries to help me understand what’s going on. She doesn’t just tell me to focus on schoolwork.” This emotional support contributed to students’ sense of belonging in the classroom, which in turn improved their academic engagement and performance.

These findings are aligned with the work of Bose and Guha (2018), who highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in improving classroom management and fostering positive interactions between teachers and students. Teachers with high EI are more effective at de-escalating conflicts, providing emotional support, and creating an environment where students feel safe to express their emotions and participate in learning.

Student Perceptions of Emotional Intelligence

From the student interviews, it became clear that students were highly aware of their teachers’ emotional intelligence and its impact on their learning experience. Students who reported having emotionally intelligent teachers expressed greater engagement and satisfaction in school. They felt that their teachers understood them not just academically, but also emotionally, which created a sense of trust and security.

One of the key findings was that students with emotionally intelligent teachers felt more connected to their teachers. They reported feeling more comfortable approaching their teachers with personal or academic concerns. As one student mentioned, “I feel like I can talk to my teacher about anything, and she won’t judge me. She makes me feel like I matter, not just as a student, but as a person.” This sense of emotional safety contributed to greater classroom participation and, in many cases, improved academic performance.

Additionally, students who had teachers with higher EI also reported experiencing less anxiety and stress related to schoolwork. Teachers who demonstrated empathy and emotional regulation created a classroom environment where students felt emotionally supported, leading to better focus and reduced academic pressure. This aligns with findings by Pattiasina et al. (2024), who found that EI training for teachers improved their emotional communication with students, which enhanced student engagement and academic outcomes.

Classroom Environment and Climate

Classroom observations revealed that teachers with high EI were able to create a positive and supportive learning environment, which was especially important in the context

of rural schools. In rural settings, where students may face socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, lack of access to resources, and family instability, emotional support in the classroom plays a critical role in student success.

Teachers with high EI were observed to use proactive classroom management strategies that promoted cooperation and emotional growth. These strategies included encouraging group work, acknowledging students' emotional needs, and fostering a sense of community within the classroom. One teacher, for example, facilitated a group discussion where students were encouraged to share their feelings about school and life in general. This open communication allowed students to express themselves freely, reducing feelings of isolation and stress.

Moreover, emotionally intelligent teachers were more likely to create inclusive classrooms, where all students, regardless of background or ability, felt valued and respected. This inclusivity was particularly important in rural schools, where diversity in students' emotional and social needs is often high. Teachers who were able to manage their own emotions effectively and empathize with their students helped create a classroom environment where students felt accepted and motivated to learn.

The positive impact of EI on classroom climate aligns with the work of Goleman (1995), who emphasized that emotionally intelligent teachers create classrooms where emotional regulation and empathy promote both personal growth and academic achievement. Zainudin et al. (2019) also found that emotional intelligence played a key role in improving students' academic performance in rural settings, as emotionally supportive environments allowed students to focus better on their studies.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Rural Settings

While emotional intelligence was found to significantly enhance teacher-student relationships, rural teachers faced specific challenges that impacted their ability to fully apply their EI. Teachers in rural schools often experienced stress and burnout due to the added pressure of working with large classes, limited resources, and students dealing with significant socio-economic hardships.

In interviews, many teachers expressed frustration over their inability to offer sufficient emotional support to all students due to the overwhelming demands of their roles. One teacher mentioned, "It's hard to manage everything. I want to be there for each student emotionally, but with so many students and so few resources, I feel stretched thin." This emotional burden, combined with the lack of institutional support, made it difficult for some teachers to consistently apply their EI in the classroom.

The study also found that lack of professional development and training in EI further hindered teachers' ability to effectively manage their emotions and respond to students' emotional needs. While some teachers naturally possessed high levels of EI, others struggled to develop these skills without targeted training. This highlights the need for professional development programs that focus on enhancing emotional intelligence in teachers, particularly in rural settings where additional challenges are common.

These challenges reflect the findings of Zhong and Zhong (2024), who noted that rural teachers often experience emotional burden due to the unique pressures of teaching in these environments. The lack of support and training in EI may exacerbate this emotional strain, making it more difficult for teachers to apply EI effectively in their interactions with students.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing teacher-student relationships in rural schools. The findings highlight the critical importance of emotional intelligence in fostering supportive, empathetic, and productive learning environments. Teachers with high EI were shown to be better equipped to manage classroom dynamics, address students' emotional needs, and build strong, trust-based relationships with their students, which in turn contributed to improved academic engagement and performance.

The study's results indicate that self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation are essential components of EI that allow teachers to effectively navigate the complex emotional landscape of rural classrooms. Teachers who demonstrated these qualities were able to create emotionally supportive environments where students felt safe, understood, and motivated to engage in learning. This is particularly important in rural schools, where students often face socio-economic challenges, and where emotional support can be a key factor in overcoming barriers to learning.

Despite the positive impact of EI, the study also uncovered challenges faced by rural teachers, such as emotional burnout, stress, and a lack of institutional support. These challenges highlight the need for professional development programs that focus on strengthening EI among teachers. Rural schools, in particular, would benefit from targeted training that helps educators better manage their emotions and respond to the emotional needs of their students.

In conclusion, emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher-student relationships, especially in rural educational settings where additional socio-economic and emotional challenges exist. For educational systems to improve student outcomes, particularly in rural areas, it is essential to provide teachers with the tools and training to develop their emotional intelligence. Supporting teachers in this way will not only improve classroom management but will also help create nurturing environments that promote both academic success and emotional well-being for students.

This study provides important insights into the impact of emotional intelligence on teaching practices, and its findings can inform future research and the development of teacher training programs aimed at fostering emotionally intelligent educators. Further studies, particularly those that focus on longitudinal impacts, could provide a deeper understanding of how EI influences long-term academic success and emotional development in students.

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