
Teachers' emotional intelligence — a vital component in the learning process

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Abstract

Teachers' role in education requires many various abilities. One of such fundamental capacities in the contemporary world is emotional intelligence. Emotional aspects in the teaching process influence overall student performance, which has been proved in many studies (Edannur, 2010; Nicolini, 2010; Brackett and Katulak, 2007; Kremenitzer, 2005, and others). Nevertheless, before educators commence handling students' emotions, it is undisputable that their emotional life must be established so as to positively impact students' academic performance. Educators ought to analyse their emotional skills first and only then proceed to expand students' emotional literacy. The aim of the research is to examine the relationship between the English teachers' level of emotional intelligence and the way they are assessed by their students. By means of the TIE 1.0 test on emotional intelligence and a questionnaire, the researcher was able to examine the issue in question. The results indicate that those teachers who demonstrate a higher level of emotional intelligence gain much higher scores in the questionnaires completed by the students in comparison to those of a low level of emotional intelligence.

Key words: emotional intelligence, emotionally intelligent teacher, teacher-student relationship, the English language

Introduction

The memories of teachers we had in our early educational life may vary greatly. There were teachers who created negative images in our minds. Fortunately, positive role models existed as well. The list of words describing such teachers' qualities seems to be long. In most cases adjectives such as: concerned, affectionate, kind, wise, and even humorous would be highlighted. Still, phrases like: annoyance, bitterness, disappointment, embarrassment, and negligence would not escape our attention. Some teachers, on the other hand, are far from being eager to create a positive relationship, thinking that students will take advantage of it in a negative way. Nothing could be further from the truth. Today's youth needs care and attention, and teachers play a very influential role. It is the teacher who motivates the learner to complete education, especially in the case of secondary school (Patti, 2006). The author of this article had a chance to witness a situation when a few students dropped out of school due to the fact that they had experienced unfair treatment and negative attitude from their teachers. And it does not necessarily refer to the teachers' competences in teaching — it is partially connected with such behaviour as: not paying enough attention to the emotional aspects in the learner-teacher relation, not calling students by their names, neglecting the feelings of boredom or confusion during the classes, or lack of respect. Some research indicates that the scarcity of utilising emotional intelligence in the classroom may lead to serious diminishment in the significance not only of the knowledge of the subject but also learning and teaching techniques applied by the teachers. For this reason, emotional intelligence is of great importance. What is therefore emotional intelligence (EI) and why has it been given so much prominence?

The concept of emotional intelligence

In the past a clear distinction between emotion and cognition was made: emotions were believed to be separated from the brain. Such a long-held notion has undergone a serious revolution and “the brain is now viewed as playing a critical role in emotional processing” (Greenberg and Snell, 1997: 95). Contemporary research into neurobiology investigates brain evolution

and its systems. The evolution of the brain led to its expansion and development, which resulted in greater structures of the brain in lower parts (responsible for, e.g., breathing, hunger). This expansion was also the reason for the appearance of the *limbic system*, which is not developed at birth. This system is responsible for primary development of various aspects of emotions, such as understanding facial emotions, action propensities, and it serves as a place for emotional memories. The limbic system consists of: the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, and hypothalamus (Kusché and Greenberg, 2006: 19). The greatest importance is given to the amygdala. LeDoux, a professor at the Center for Neural Science at New York University, illuminates that the amygdala is able to take charge of our actions, even though our brain (thinking brain — the neocortex) has not made any decision yet (LeDoux, 1999). As Goleman states, “the workings of the amygdala and its interplay with the neocortex are at the heart of emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995: 16).

In 1990 the first psychologists who dealt with scientific research and introduced the primary formal definition of emotional intelligence were Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey (Salovey and Sluyter, 1997). They defined emotional intelligence as

the capacity to reason about emotions to enhance thinking. It [EI] includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to assess and generate emotions to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (Mayer and Salovey, 1997: 5)

The definition explains emotional intelligence as the ability to understand expressions of emotions in oneself and others, together with making the advantage of emotions in thoughts and actions (Śmieja and Orzechowski, 2008: 21). The authors of the definition call emotional intelligence *the ability model*, asserting that it is our mental ability which is not inherited but can be developed throughout our entire life. They also divide the construct into four different abilities or skills, which Mayer and Salovey (1997) call *branches*. Those are: perception and expression of emotion, assimilating

emotion in thought, understanding and analyzing emotion, reflective regulation of emotion (Caruso et al., 2002).

Being more often in the limelight, emotional intelligence could not have escaped pedagogical concerns for learners, teachers, and educators because a significant number of researchers perceive emotional intelligence as a significant indicator of educational and occupational criteria (Matthews et al., 2002). The ability to take advantage of emotional intelligence is a valuable skill which may lead to notable benefits. The introduction of emotional intelligence into the English language classroom would mean preparing students to live in the real world, which in consequence, would be equivalent to learners' considerable accomplishment together with long-lasting development throughout life (Aziz, 2004). Academic excellence counts incontrovertibly, nevertheless, teachers need to strike a balance between cognitive and emotional intelligence fields. Yet, before they start focusing on emotional literacy in their learners, they should reflect upon their ways of teaching by assessing their own emotional literacy. And the question which needs to be answered here is: "What qualities should an emotionally intelligent teacher possess?"

Emotionally intelligent teacher

There are certain characteristics of an emotionally intelligent teacher which can be enumerated. Such a teacher devotes plenty of energy to creating an encouraging atmosphere in the classroom and takes into account the learners' feelings. He or she should be an expert at listening; additionally, they should pay attention to the learners' expectations. An effective teacher can be associated with devotion to learners, enthusiasm in the teaching process, a unique approach to their profession so as to be able to establish a harmonious relationship with their students. Obviously, interpersonal qualities count and adjectives such as: empathic, approachable, and relating to students as equals, can be mentioned as well (Mortiboys, 2005). Mortiboys (2005) suggests an activity in which one will be able to determine what qualities an emotionally intelligent teacher possesses in addition to the possibility of assessing the skills and abilities connected with the competencies related to emotional intelligence (Activity 1).

Activity 1

The qualities of an emotionally intelligent teacher

This activity invites you to categorize different types of qualities that good teachers have and to identify the particular qualities associated with teachers who use emotional intelligence.

1. Think of a good teacher whom you have encountered in any context when you were a learner.
2. What words and phrases capture what was good about them?
3. Here are some more words and phrases used to describe good teachers, which might be added to the list that describes the teacher you outlined in the previous question.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expert• Knowledgeable• Authoritative• Resourceful• Experienced• Up-to-date• Can answer any question on the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well organized• Manages time well• Useful feedback• Well prepared• Good use of materials and teaching aids• Clear speaking• Clear directions• Relevant, interesting and challenging activities• Good materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approachable• Acceptant• Positive• Good listener• Demonstrates empathy• Makes eye contact• Responsive• Attentive• Non-threatening• Open• Respectful• Recognises me• Doesn't make assumptions

- Words and phrases in the first column relate to the teacher's expertise and subject knowledge.
 - Words and phrases in the second column relate to their skills as a teacher.
 - Words and phrases in the third column relate to their emotional intelligence.
4. Which words and phrases from the list above would people apply to you as a teacher? What proportion of these are emotionally intelligent attributes?

Adapted from: Mortiboys (2005: 10–11)

By undergoing a thorough analysis of the above presented abilities, the teacher will be capable of judging his or her 'emotionality' and only if their emotional competence is on its appropriate level, can they move on to the programs whose aim is to focus on students' emotional abilities. Aziz (2004) emphasizes that

in the attempt to develop emotional intelligence, schools and teachers should be made aware of their roles, as schools are the best platform to initiate this change and are the places where value or moral education can be fostered. (2004: XII)

Hence, preparing a suitable curriculum is one thing; quite another one is putting its content into practice. It has been accurately pointed out by a psychologist Carolyn Saarni (1997, 35–36; in Salovey and Sluyter, 1997) that emotional competence goes together with wisdom which should be possessed by teachers whose essential role is to recognize the involvement of their own and learners' feelings in the learning process. If cooperation is to take place, teachers ought to be in harmony with students, but also students need to cooperate with one another. Why is this cooperation crucial? If a teacher is to spot students' troubling moments, or cases of hard life situations and be willing to help them resolving the predicaments, mutual trust and fellowship must be in existence. As usually happens, such students in need do not eagerly share what is bothering them. Only by being distracted from learning, by disturbing the class atmosphere and not paying enough attention, are they able to signal to the teacher that something is wrong. In this case, teachers' knowledge of emotional intelligence is highly desired.

Increased disability to handle and control emotions requires incorporating emotional intelligence into the teaching process. Thus, it is not only students whose emotions count. If teachers do not feel confident enough to introduce emotional intelligence, they should start the training from themselves so as to facilitate students' academic achievements. In-depth trainings must be part and parcel of the teacher's knowledge before the implementation of the emotional-intelligence program. Houston (1997), an experienced 40-year-old teacher, commenting on Saarni's (1997) article, emphasises the constant development of emotional competence including not only students'

environment but teachers' as well, which leads to the creation of a more peaceful and empathic society. What matters the most is teachers' contribution to supply students with help essential in putting their knowledge into practice. Integrating cognitive and emotional intelligence into the teaching process will enable students to perform the tasks and become prolific constituents of society (Hatch and Kornhaber, 2006, in Elias and Arnold, 2006).

The aim of the study

At the beginning of the school year in 2012 the author conducted a study which measured the English teachers' level of emotional intelligence. What the researcher was eager to evaluate was the possible impact of the teachers' emotional literacy on the relationships with their students. The following questions were investigated:

1. Are the teachers with a higher level of emotional intelligence perceived as better by the students they teach?
2. Does the learners' performance depend on the way they are treated by their teachers?

Participants

There were two groups that participated in the research. The first group consisted of 20 secondary school teachers of English from four most popular secondary schools in the heart of Częstochowa — 19 females and 1 male, aged between 26 and 53 years old. The second group involved 493 students of secondary schools taught by the examined teachers: 332 women and 161 men, aged between 16 and 18 years old.

Instruments

There were two instruments used in the research. The first one involved the measurement of emotional intelligence and it was the TIE 1.0 test created by Śmieja et al. (2007). It is a performance test based on the ability model of emotional intelligence formulated by Mayer and Salovey (1997) adapted to the Polish context. The test, which consists of 24 items, is divided into two parts and contains questions which are answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 — a very bad answer to 5 — a very good answer, and

takes approximately 20–25 minutes to complete. The first part refers to the ability connected with identification and expression of emotions, e.g.:

Last night Agata was assaulted on the street. Luckily she managed to escape an aggressive assailant. The following day, while meeting her friends, she behaves in an easy-going way, she even smiles. Do you think that:

- a) *the assault did not make any difference to her*
1 2 3 4 5
- b) *she tries to deal with damming the emotions up*
1 2 3 4 5
- c) *she has already overcome the stress*
1 2 3 4 5

In the second part the participants ought to apply their ability to use and regulate emotions, e.g.:

Again Iza's job offer has been rejected. She is tired with these fruitless attempts to find a job. How should she spend the afternoon so as to get back a good mood?

- a) *to go for a drink with her friends*
1 2 3 4 5
- b) *once again concentrate and work on improving her CV and letters of application*
1 2 3 4 5
- c) *watch TV*
1 2 3 4 5

Higher scores indicate higher levels of emotional intelligence.

The second utilized instrument was a questionnaire consisting of 18 questions entitled “Characteristics of the teacher-student relationship” (see Appendix 1). The students evaluated the teachers of English in terms of their emotional competence. The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher on the basis of the publication entitled “Teaching with Emotional Intelligence: A step-by-step guide for higher and further education professionals” (Mortiboys, 2005).

Procedure

At the beginning of the school year in 2012 all the data was gathered. After obtaining permission from the English teachers, the students were asked to complete the questionnaire during one of their English lessons. Generally, it took them approximately 10 minutes (however, there was a handful of students who kept procrastinating completing the task). The TIE 1.0 test on emotional intelligence was more time-consuming and laborious, therefore the teachers were asked to take the test home and bring it the following day. Subsequently, arithmetical means of the outcomes of the completed questionnaires were counted and computed. Also, the teachers' EI level was calculated by means of the STATISTICA 10 program. The general score of emotional intelligence was taken into account, as well as its four subscales, namely perception, understanding, assimilation, and management.

Results

The TIE 1.0 test was applied with the aim of assessing the teachers' level of emotional intelligence. The results are presented in Table 1.

Variable	N	M	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Perception	20	8.44	4.88	10.62	1.67
Understanding	20	7.80	4.43	9.85	1.66
Assimilation	20	7.28	4.94	9.94	1.35
Management	20	6.91	5.52	8.42	0.85
Total	20	30.45	21.43	36.98	4.75

Table 1.
The teacher's level of emotional intelligence.

The table above presents the outcomes of the teachers' emotional intelligence examination. As the results show, the highest score was obtained in the ability to perceive emotions (means=8.44). The lowest outcomes referred to the sphere of management of emotions (means=6.91), which indicates that the teachers are much better at perceiving emotions than at managing them.

The next step was to examine the students' perception of their teachers of English by means of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

	N	M	Minimum	Maximum	SD
The results of the questionnaire	20	63.86	53.61	73.63	6.12

Table 2.
The students' perception of their English teachers.

Table 2 shows the results of the questionnaire completed by the students. They evaluated their teachers on 63.86 points — the average score in the questionnaire. There were 18 statements with the answers provided on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Each answer was given from 1 to 5 points. The 63.86 outcome was the average of the outcomes of all of the students. The lowest possible score to achieve was 18 points and the highest 90 points. The result comprises the indicator of the teachers' evaluation by the students. The lowest result equals 53.61 points and the highest 73.63 points.

The final step in the research was to examine the correlation between the variables. For this reason, all the data was entered into the STATISTICA 10 program, by means of which the calculations were conducted. The outcomes are presented below.

Summary	R (X,Y) Pearson
Perception	0.50*
Understanding	0.45*
Assimilation	0.53*
Management	0.35
Total	0.55*

* a significant correlation which takes the value of $p < 0,05$

Table 3.
The relationship between the instruments.

Table 3 depicts the value of the correlation (R) between the quality of a teacher-student relationship and the teachers' global level of emotional intelligence examined in four areas: perception, understanding, assimilation, and management, where **X** is the value of a teacher-student relationship, **Y** is the teachers' global level of emotional intelligence examined. The data was obtained via the TIE 1.0 test on EI and the applied questionnaire designed by the researcher. A significant correlation in terms of perception, understanding, assimilation and the general score of EI is visible and it takes the value $p < 0.05$. The management scale does not correlate; however, the overall results indicate the correlation between the teachers' EI and their relationships with the students.

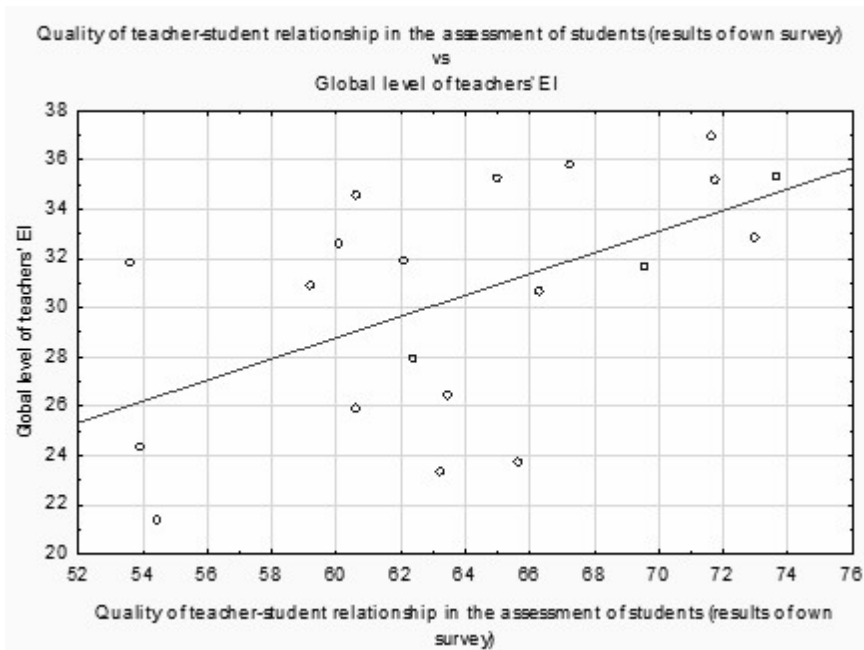


Figure 1.

The linear interrelationship between the teachers' EI and the way they were assessed by their students.

Figure 1 also indicates the correlation between the teachers' EI and the relationships with their students. This linear interrelationship shows that the teachers with higher level of emotional intelligence have emotionally better relationships with their students. Moreover, the higher the teachers' level of emotional intelligence, the better they are assessed by their students. Those teachers who possess a higher level of emotional intelligence have positive relationships with their students showing communicative and interpersonal abilities of a better quality.

Discussion

The aim of the research was to analyze the teacher-student relationship by means of measuring the teachers' level of emotional intelligence and examining the students' opinions about the teachers in question. Two following questions were asked:

1. Are the teachers with a higher level of emotional intelligence perceived better by the students they teach?
2. Does the learners' performance depend on the way they are treated by their teachers?

The outcomes of the study demonstrate a correlation between the students' positive opinion of a given teacher and this teacher's level of emotional intelligence — if a teacher had a high level of emotional intelligence, he or she was perceived by the students in a very positive light, as reflected in the questionnaire score. Obtaining the answer to the second research question was possible by a thorough analysis of the questionnaire completed by the participants. The teachers demonstrating a higher level of emotional intelligence created better relationships with their students. As the data from the questionnaires revealed, the reason behind it is the fact that the students found such teachers empathic and preoccupied with the students' emotional life. Such teachers adopted a friendly and warm approach towards the learners by motivating, encouraging and treating them with respect. Additionally, free discussion and expression of thoughts and feelings took place during those teachers' lessons. A holistic attitude towards the students was observed — an irreplaceable quality in the contemporary education.

Hence, the researcher's assumption that emotional intelligence played a fundamental role in the teacher-student relationship was confirmed. Such a bond depends on the teacher's level of emotional intelligence. As stated earlier, it is the teacher who influences students to a great extent. In such a case, teachers who demonstrate a higher level of emotional intelligence determine the students' overall school performance because, as researchers indicate (Petrides et al., 2004; Brackett and Katulak, 2007; Pekrun et al., 2002), an emotionally encouraging school environment positively influences students' academic achievement. If learners are treated in a holistic and respectful way, the process of learning a foreign language is facilitated and accelerated. Accordingly, teachers demonstrating a higher level of emotional intelligence will be more successful and satisfied in their profession.

Implementations

The results of the study require a profound analysis of the whole classroom environment. It is the emotionally intelligent teacher who is of great importance. Since emotional intelligence is not inherited but can be developed, educators should evaluate their own emotional competence in order to be able to pay special attention to students' emotional needs. Familiarizing themselves with the concept of EI would enable them to enhance learners' emotional literacy through a number of programs, which do not have to be designed as an additional school subject but can be incorporated into other lessons (Zeidner et al., 2009). Implementing emotional intelligence programs into the school curriculum appears to be unavoidable. The desired academic results will be achieved if educational institutions put more emphasis on students' emotional intelligence and do not concentrate predominantly on cognitive ones.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Age.....

Sex.....

Characteristics of the teacher-student relationship

Respond to the following statements using the scale from 1 to 5 where: 1 equals 'strongly disagree' and 5 — 'strongly agree.'

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I have got a good contact with my teacher.					
2.	I would like to have a better relationship with my teacher.					
3.	The teacher devotes his / her attention equally to all of the students.					
4.	The teacher is of his / her assistance inside and outside the classroom.					
5.	The teacher encourages and motivates students to learn a foreign language.					

6.	The teacher eagerly listens about the students' problems.					
7.	The teacher has a friendly and warm approach to the students.					
8.	The teacher talks to the students in an appropriate way.					
9.	The teacher treats the students with respect.					
10.	The teacher takes an interest in the students.					
11.	The teacher lets the students freely express their thoughts and feelings.					
12.	The teacher takes initiative in showing appropriate interest in a student's private life.					
13.	The teacher takes into account the student's opinion.					
14.	The teacher tries to assist the students who need help.					
15.	The teacher displays empathy towards the students.					
16.	The teacher receptive to constructive criticism in a skillful way.					
17.	The teacher treats fairly all the students.					
18.	The teacher permits 'a free discussion' to take place during the classes.					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

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