THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract: *Emotional intelligence is increasingly recognized as an important professional competence in education because teachers' emotional abilities shape classroom interactions, relationship quality, and students' engagement. This paper examines the role of emotional intelligence in teacher-student relationships through a narrative review of the ability model of emotional intelligence, the RULER approach, and the prosocial classroom model. The review focuses on emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, relationship management, and their implications for classroom climate. The literature suggests that teachers who recognize and regulate emotions effectively are better positioned to respond constructively to students' needs, manage conflict, and create supportive learning environments. Evidence from school-based social and emotional learning approaches also indicates potential benefits for classroom climate, social-emotional competence, and academic engagement, although outcomes depend on implementation quality and educational context. The paper proposes practical applications, including emotional check-ins, process-oriented communication, reflective practice, and sustained professional development. It concludes that emotional intelligence should be developed as part of teachers' professional competence rather than treated as an isolated personal trait.*

Keywords: *emotional intelligence; teacher-student relationships; social and emotional learning; classroom climate; teacher professional development*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teacher-student relationships are central to students' classroom experiences, engagement, and well-being. These relationships are shaped not only by teachers' subject knowledge and instructional skills but also by how teachers perceive emotions, regulate their responses, communicate empathy, and manage interpersonal situations. Emotional intelligence therefore provides a useful perspective for examining the emotional processes that underlie effective teaching and supportive classroom relationships.

Emotional intelligence is commonly conceptualized as a set of abilities related to perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Mayer et al., 2004). In educational settings, these abilities may help teachers recognize students' emotional cues, respond appropriately to frustration or anxiety, and maintain constructive interactions during challenging situations. The prosocial classroom model similarly proposes that teachers' social and emotional competence supports their well-being, classroom management, relationships with students, and the implementation of social and emotional learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

This paper aims to examine the importance of emotional intelligence in teacher-student relationships. It adopts a narrative review approach and synthesizes theoretical and empirical contributions concerning emotional intelligence, teacher social-emotional competence, classroom climate, and school-based emotional learning. The discussion addresses three questions: how emotional intelligence supports teacher-student relationships; how it may influence classroom climate and student engagement; and how teachers and educational institutions can develop emotionally supportive practices.

II. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

2.1. The Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The ability model defines emotional intelligence as the capacity to process emotional information through four related abilities: perceiving emotion, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotional meanings, and managing emotion (Mayer et al., 2004). This model treats emotional intelligence as a set of abilities rather than a broad collection of desirable personality traits. Such a distinction is important in education because it directs attention to skills that can be observed, practised, and developed.

For teachers, emotion perception includes noticing verbal and non-verbal indicators of students' anxiety, frustration, interest, or disengagement. Emotion understanding involves interpreting these signals in relation to the learning situation, while emotion management concerns regulating one's own responses and selecting an

appropriate interpersonal response. These abilities do not replace pedagogical knowledge, but they may support its effective use in emotionally demanding classroom situations.

2.2. Emotional Intelligence in Educational Contexts

Brackett et al. (2011) argue that emotional abilities have implications for personal functioning, social relationships, learning, and workplace performance. In classrooms, teachers' emotional competence may influence communication, conflict management, feedback, and the emotional tone of instruction. Students may be more willing to participate, ask questions, and seek assistance when they perceive their teacher as attentive, fair, and emotionally responsive.

Emotional intelligence should nevertheless be distinguished from constant positivity or the suppression of negative emotion. Appropriate emotional functioning involves recognizing both pleasant and unpleasant emotions, understanding the information they convey, and responding in ways that are proportionate to the situation. A teacher may therefore acknowledge frustration or disappointment while still communicating respectfully and maintaining clear expectations.

III. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

3.1. Emotional Awareness and Regulation

Teaching frequently involves time pressure, competing student needs, disruptive behaviour, and emotionally charged interactions. Teachers who can identify their own emotional responses may be better able to pause, reassess a situation, and avoid impulsive reactions. Emotion regulation can consequently contribute to consistent classroom management and reduce the likelihood that temporary frustration will damage the teacher-student relationship.

Emotional awareness also helps teachers distinguish between a student's behaviour and the possible emotions underlying it. Withdrawal may reflect anxiety rather than disinterest, while resistance may arise from embarrassment or fear of failure. Such interpretations should not be treated as certain without further evidence, but they can encourage teachers to enquire, listen, and respond constructively rather than relying solely on punitive reactions.

3.2. Empathy and Relationship Management

Empathy enables teachers to consider students' perspectives while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. When students feel that their concerns are heard and treated seriously, trust and a sense of belonging may develop. Relationship management builds on this understanding through respectful communication, clear expectations, constructive feedback, and the repair of relationships after conflict.

The prosocial classroom model places these competencies within a broader process: teachers' social-emotional competence and well-being influence their relationships with students, classroom management, and capacity to create a supportive climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The model also recognizes a possible cycle in which emotionally demanding classrooms increase teacher distress, whereas supportive relationships and effective management can strengthen both teacher and student functioning.

3.3. Classroom Climate and Student Engagement

A supportive emotional climate is characterized by respect, emotional safety, predictable expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Research on classroom emotional climate indicates that positive emotional interactions are associated with student engagement and academic achievement (Reyes et al., 2012). These associations do not imply that emotional intelligence alone determines academic outcomes; instructional quality, learning resources, prior achievement, and wider social conditions also remain important.

The educational value of emotional intelligence therefore lies partly in creating conditions under which teaching and learning can occur more effectively. Students who feel respected and supported may be more willing to attempt difficult tasks, disclose misunderstandings, and recover from mistakes. Conversely, an emotionally unsafe classroom may discourage participation even when the academic content is well designed.

IV. EVIDENCE FROM SCHOOL-BASED APPROACHES

4.1. Skill-Based Emotional Learning in the Classroom

Brackett and Katulak (2007) describe a skill-based approach to emotional intelligence that emphasizes recognizing, understanding, labelling, expressing, and regulating emotions. These competencies later became central to the RULER approach. Classroom tools such as an emotional check-in or Mood Meter can provide

a shared vocabulary for discussing emotions and selecting regulation strategies. Their value lies not in labelling students permanently but in helping learners notice that emotional states vary and can be managed.

The approach also emphasizes the teacher's role in modelling emotional skills. Teachers influence classroom norms through the ways they express disagreement, respond to mistakes, and communicate expectations. Emotional learning is therefore unlikely to be effective when presented as an isolated activity; it needs to be reflected consistently in everyday classroom interaction.

4.2. Teacher Social and Emotional Competence

Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom model extends the discussion beyond individual techniques. It proposes that teachers' social and emotional competence affects teacher-student relationships, classroom management, classroom climate, and students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes. The model is valuable because it connects teachers' emotional functioning with both instructional processes and occupational well-being.

This perspective also highlights institutional responsibility. Teachers cannot be expected to maintain emotionally supportive classrooms through personal effort alone when they face excessive workload, inadequate resources, or limited professional support. Emotional competence should therefore be developed alongside supportive leadership, realistic working conditions, and access to appropriate student-support services.

4.3. Evidence from the RULER Approach

Empirical work on RULER provides evidence that structured emotional-learning programmes may support educational outcomes. In a quasi-experimental study involving fifth- and sixth-grade students, Brackett et al. (2012) reported benefits in academic performance and aspects of social and emotional competence among students exposed to the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum. Other research has linked classroom emotional climate with student engagement and achievement (Reyes et al., 2012).

These findings support the educational relevance of emotional skills, but they should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Programme effects may vary according to age group, implementation quality, teacher preparation, school culture, and the measures used. Evidence from a particular programme or educational system should not automatically be generalized to every classroom context.

V. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

5.1. Classroom Practices

Teachers can incorporate emotional awareness into ordinary classroom routines without turning lessons into therapy. Brief emotional check-ins can help students identify their current state and select appropriate learning strategies. Teachers can also model precise emotional vocabulary, acknowledge frustration during difficult tasks, and use questions that help students reflect on how emotions influence attention, behaviour, and decision-making.

Literature, classroom discussion, and reflective writing can provide indirect and developmentally appropriate opportunities to explore emotional experience. Mindfulness or breathing activities may also be useful when applied voluntarily and with sensitivity to students' needs. Where a student's difficulties exceed the teacher's professional role, referral to qualified support services is more appropriate than informal counselling by the classroom teacher.

5.2. Teacher Development and Institutional Support

Professional development should allow teachers to practise active listening, emotion regulation, conflict de-escalation, and constructive feedback rather than merely introducing definitions of emotional intelligence. Reflection on classroom incidents, peer observation, mentoring, and feedback can help teachers connect emotional skills with specific pedagogical decisions.

Educational institutions can support this development by integrating social-emotional competence into teacher education, providing access to student-support personnel, and establishing collegial structures that reduce professional isolation. Self-care may contribute to teacher well-being, but it should complement rather than replace institutional measures addressing workload, role clarity, and working conditions.

5.3. Considerations for Implementation

Emotional-intelligence practices should not be presented as universal solutions to classroom or academic difficulties. Their effectiveness depends on students' ages, cultural expectations,

individual needs, and the wider educational environment. Teachers should avoid compelling students to disclose private feelings and should use emotional check-ins in ways that protect dignity and confidentiality.

Implementation should also remain connected to the core purposes of teaching. Emotional support is most educationally valuable when it helps students participate, persist, communicate, and learn. Clear objectives, suitable training, and ongoing evaluation are therefore necessary if emotional-intelligence initiatives are to contribute meaningfully to classroom practice.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the importance of emotional intelligence in teacher-student relationships through the ability model of emotional intelligence, skill-based classroom approaches, and the prosocial classroom model. The reviewed literature indicates that emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and relationship management can help teachers respond constructively to students' needs, manage challenging interactions, and create a supportive emotional climate.

The evidence also suggests that emotional competence is connected with classroom management, student engagement, and aspects of social-emotional and academic development. However, emotional intelligence should not be treated as an isolated personal quality or a substitute for pedagogical expertise. Its educational value depends on its integration with effective instruction, appropriate professional boundaries, institutional support, and sensitivity to context.

Practical applications may include emotional check-ins, reflective discussion, supportive communication, teacher modelling, and sustained professional development. Schools and teacher-education programmes should provide opportunities for teachers to develop these competencies while also addressing the organizational conditions that shape classroom relationships. Further research is needed to examine how specific practices influence teacher-student relationships and student outcomes across different cultural and educational contexts.

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