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Psychological issues of the relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety levels in teachers

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Abstract

This article systematically examines the psychological aspects of the relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety levels in teachers. The main components of emotional intelligence—recognition, understanding, and management of emotions—are analyzed in the context of teachers' professional activities. The study showed an inverse relationship between empathy and emotion recognition ($r = -.279, p \leq 0.05$). These results demonstrate the relationship between empathy, understanding of other people's emotions, and emotion recognition. High empathy correlates with high emotion recognition or, conversely, high emotion recognition is associated with de-

veloped empathy. A direct relationship was found between general emotional intelligence (integrative emotional intelligence) and situational anxiety ($r = .486, p \leq 0.01$). These results indicate a relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety caused by a specific stressful situation; therefore, emotional intelligence helps reduce situational anxiety in stressful situations. The article also provides practical recommendations for developing teachers' emotional skills and highlights the importance of future research in this direction.

Keywords: teachers, emotional intelligence, anxiety level, interaction, psychological issues

1. INTRODUCTION

Manifestations of emotional intelligence in education are diverse and characterized by specific psychological factors. Studies have shown that emotional intelligence has only recently begun to be studied. Research on emotional intelligence has revealed that any cognitive mechanism has an emotional component, and this component, in turn, can affect not only the process of working with information but also its result, and generally ensures the effectiveness of intellectual activity.

Some of the first researchers who studied emotional intelligence presented it as a complex ability of a person to recognize, express, and manage emotions, as well as to use them to achieve results in activities, including social adaptation and professional activities [1]. A number of researchers have tried to confirm that a high level of emotional intelligence is a factor that minimizes the risk of emotional exhaustion [2]. Based on this fact, it can be said that the relationship between emotional intelligence and aggression is meaningful at the level of various components. It has been established that the higher the ability to control emotions and manage the intrapersonal state, the less aggressiveness is observed in the behavior of students. A number of studies have shown that the relationship between emotional intelligence and the index of aggression allows the ability to control emotional manifestations to show less aggression toward people around [2].

However, emotional intelligence can create a sense of satisfaction with professional activity, provide conditions for professional self-awareness, and contribute to the preservation of teachers' mental health. Its individual components can have a positive effect on the regulation of a person's psychoemotional state. For example, reducing a high level of personal anxiety is possible by developing the ability to control one's emotions, which is confirmed by numerous studies [3]. Naturally, anxiety in pedagogical activity affects the effectiveness of activity at one level or another. The evidence shows that emotional intelligence determines the ability of a teacher to perform appropriate actions in emotionally tense situations that arise in interactions with students and their parents [4]. A number of anxiety-provoking and conflict situations are often the main source of professional stress for teachers, and the ability to minimize the negative impact of stress factors, choose the most optimal strategy for one's own behavior, and influence the behavior of interlocutors is the key to constructive interaction.

At the same time, researchers show that emotional intelligence determines the ability of teachers to build relationships with other participants in the educational environment, and the high level of development of its components facilitates the selection of the optimal response option and an adequate behavioral model in situations characterized by high emotional stress [4].

According to a number of researchers, anxiety is a negative emotional experience associated with a situation. Anxiety is a relatively stable trait throughout life. Solovyeva [5] showed in her study that a long-term state of anxiety can turn into a permanent personality trait; that is, anxiety can become a persistent trait when exposed to unfavorable factors for a long time. In this regard, the development of the structural components of emotional intelligence can reduce anxiety and ensure optimal activity. A number of researchers have shown that school principals with high emotional intelligence are less prone to anxiety and are more focused on the interests of others [6]. From studies in this direction, it can be concluded that the importance of highly developed emotional intelligence for teachers is obvious and confirmed by numerous studies. It should be noted that in teaching practice, as well as in solving various management problems in the field of education, emotional intelligence is defined as a key interprofessional competence, which, on the one hand, indicates the need for its detailed study, and, on the other hand, the identification of development mechanisms in all participants in educational interactions. The main goal of this article is to investigate the relationship between the manifestations of emotional intelligence and the level of anxiety in teachers.

2. DEVELOPMENT

It should be noted that changing conditions, the improvement and modernization of the education system, the rapid computerization and complexity of professional activity tools place increasingly high demands on teachers as the main actors in the educational environment. These demands, against the background of building an empathetic relationship, reduce their influence and can hinder the effective activity of the teacher [7]. Evidence shows that only a teacher with emotional maturity and the ability to withstand numerous professional stress factors and avoid burnout can cope with such a workload [8]. However, teaching is also usually considered one of the most emotionally intense and stressful jobs. A number of studies have confirmed that the majority of school teachers are already experiencing varying degrees of professional stress, their psychoemotional state is inadequate, they are anxious, and they experience signs of depression [9].

Another possible factor influencing the manifestation of emotional intelligence in pedagogical activity is teaching experience. Some experts believe that these abilities can develop and improve with a person's immersion in professional activity [10]. However, the risk of professional burnout increases in the teaching profession. In this context, emotional intelligence can be considered a resource for the professional health of teachers [11].

It should be borne in mind that anxiety is a normal human reaction to potentially threatening situations or to experiencing

uncertainty. However, the persistence of such emotions and their extrapolation to the vast majority of events occurring within a person are clear signs of excessive emotional stress. In this case, fatigue can develop and lead to teacher burnout. It is important to diagnose the manifestations of unreasonable anxiety in a timely manner, identify its possible cause, and use methods that help stabilize the person's psychoemotional state.

Emotional intelligence is one of the tools that can help prevent both situational and personal increases in anxiety and help cope with existing negative experiences. Researchers show that a teacher's emotional competence and ability to manage emotions help minimize the impact of negative professional factors. This fact has been confirmed by a number of studies.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. DESIGN

The study of the relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety in teachers was conducted as part of a pilot experiment with a comparative research design. The total sample size consisted of 80 teachers, with an average age of 39.22 years and an average teaching experience of 16.24 years. Among the respondents, 46.35% were men and 53.65% were women. The teachers taught at universities, and each teacher's lesson was observed.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted on teachers teaching psychology, social-psychological research in education, and social work. Twenty teachers were recruited from each specialty group. A total of 80 teachers participated in the study. Thirty-seven of them were male (46.35%), and 43 (53.65%) were female. They were informed about the use of various methods, and their consent was obtained.

3.3. INSTRUMENTS

Several methods were used in the study. One of them was the Emotional Intelligence Assessment Test (N. Hall) to measure emotional intelligence and its structural components. The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine the extent to which students use various emotions in everyday life, taking into account various aspects of emotional intelligence: attitude toward others, communication skills, outlook on life, and the search for harmony.

This method is designed to assess the ability to understand personal relationships represented by emotions and to manage the emotional sphere through decision-making. It consists of 30 statements and includes five scales:

1. Emotional awareness;
2. Managing one's emotions (more emotional tolerance, less emotional instability);
3. Self-motivation (with the exception of item 14, more likely a person's voluntary control over his or her own emotions);
4. Empathy;
5. Recognizing other people's emotions (more precisely, the ability to influence the emotional state of other people).

When assessing the test, the following criteria were used: completely disagree (-3 points); mostly disagree (-2 points); partly disagree (-1 point); partly agree (+1 point); mostly agree (+2 points); completely agree (+3 points).

In this study, the Anxiety Level Self-Assessment Methodology (C. D. Spielberger, Y. L. Khanina) was used to measure teachers' anxiety.

The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine the level of situational and personal anxiety. It aims to determine the general structure for the express diagnostics of anxiety. The tool assesses anxiety separately. It consists of two subtests designed to assess the level of anxiety and includes 15 statements, each of which the respondent must evaluate according to his or her agreement on a 4-point scale. The subtest statements are completely identical; only the instructions are different. Based on the diagnostic results, a total score and 5 scale values (12 scales in total) can be obtained for each subtest.

The test includes two main scales: "Situational Anxiety" and "Personal Anxiety" — these are integral test indicators. Analysis of the integral anxiety indicators showed that teachers demonstrated a moderate level of anxiety with a tendency toward increasing levels. Importantly, it was found that personal anxiety prevailed over situational anxiety, and this was statistically significant (Student's t-test for two unrelated samples, $T = -5.35$, $p \leq 0.01$). This means that they are more likely to experience personal threats, increased sensitivity to mistakes and failures, and anxiety as a personality trait that includes dissatisfaction with themselves and others.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

The research work was started by studying, analyzing, and generalizing the problem that was obtained and identified from the empirical approach. After that, permission was sought from the educational institution to obtain the information through the presentation. After agreement, the tools were applied so that the data could be entered into the SPSS 24 statistical software for differential analysis in accordance with the proposed objectives. After generalizing the obtained data, their placement in designs or tables began.

3.5. ETHICAL CRITERIA

Before the study, the information necessary for conducting the study was presented to the ethics committee, and a positive result was obtained. In addition, the international ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence required for the study were taken into account; therefore, it was declared that the results would be used for the benefit of the participants under no circumstances, without the intention of harming them. Compliance with the principle of autonomy was also taken into account, as willingness to participate in the study was subject to informed consent and assent.

4. RESULTS

First, the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (N. Hall) was used to assess the characteristics of emotional intelligence in teachers. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicators of partial and integrative emotional intelligence in teachers

Emotional Types Scale of Intelligence	Scale	Levels		
		High	Medium	Low
Partial	A	42.00	36.00	22.00
	B	32.00	44.00	24.00
	C	32.00	41.00	27.00
	D	26.00	42.00	22.00
	E	28.00	56.00	16.00
Integrative	F	24.00	60.00	16.00

Note: scales A – emotional self-awareness, B – managing one’s own emotions, C – self-motivation, D – empathy, E – managing the emotions of others, F – general indicator (integrative emotional intelligence)

As can be seen from Table 1, before determining the level of anxiety of teachers, we tried to assess their levels of emotional intelligence. As can be seen from Table 1, 42% of teachers scored high on the “emotional self-awareness” scale. Accordingly, the average level of teachers on the first scale was 36%, and the low level was 22%. These results indicate that they tend to expand their emotional sphere and have a deep understanding of their inner states. This is a factual aspect.

Similarly, as can be seen from Table 1, 56% of teachers scored average on the “recognizing the emotions of others” scale. These results demonstrate their ability to recognize the emotional states of others. Also, 42% of teachers scored average on the “empathy” scale, and 44% of teachers scored average on the “emotional management” scale.

These results demonstrate the emotional flexibility of teachers and their voluntary management of their emotions. Teachers are able to empathize with the emotional states of others, which allows them to create a humanistic relationship with students and create a basis for reducing the aggressive background.

Also, 36% of teachers scored low on the “self-motivation” scale. These results indicate that they have certain difficulties in controlling their behavior through emotional regulation. In addition, 60% of teachers were rated average for the “integrative emotional intelligence” indicator. These results indicate that teachers have above-average emotional intelligence: they can control their own emotions, easily recognize the emotions of others, and tend to empathize with the emotional states of others. Thus, the study of partial and integrative emotional intelligence in teachers showed that most of them demonstrated a high level of emotional self-awareness and average levels of controlling the emotions of others.

These indicators were expressed in their own way on other scales. In general, we can say that the level of emotional intelligence of teachers is higher than the average level on the scales, which can help us in measuring other parameters in the study. In order to achieve the goal set from this aspect, we tried to determine the indicators of the level of anxiety in teachers.

Situational and personal anxiety were assessed using the “Self-assessment of anxiety” method (C.D. Spielberger, Yu.L. Khanina). The results are presented in Table 2.

As can be seen from Table 2, 46.24% of teachers reported a moderate level of anxiety on the scale. These results indicate that teachers are unable to cope with anxiety, find rational explanations for it, and reduce anxiety. In difficult life situations related to education, teachers are unable to cope quickly with stress and find the right solution; they are forced to work on various skills to reduce anxiety, which creates additional psychological discomfort.

Table 2. Indicators of personal and situational anxiety in teachers

Types of anxiety	Levels Indicator %
Situational Anxiety	High 24.56
	Average 46.24
	Low 29.20
Personal Anxiety	High 42.13
	Average 22.86
	Low 35.01

On the personal anxiety scale, 42.13% of teachers reported high levels. These results indicate a high level of anxiety, which reflects the persistence of stressful and critical life situations. Stressful learning situations have a negative impact on learning. Thus, the assessment of the level of situational and personal anxiety among teachers showed that most teachers have a moderate level of situational anxiety and a high level of personal anxiety. Correlation analysis was carried out using the linear correlation method of K. Pearson. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Indicators of the relationship between anxiety level and emotional intelligence in teachers

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	-	-,003	-,140	,002	,289	,148	,364*
2		-	-,196	-,038	,309	-,154	-,362
3			-	-,018	-,052	-,149	,012
4				-	-,279*	,139	,224
5					-	,056	-,006
6						-	,486**
7							-

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$; scales 1 – emotional self-awareness, 2 – managing one’s own emotions, 3 – self-motivation, 4 – empathy, 5 – managing the emotions of others, 6 – general indicator (integrative emotional intelligence), 7 – anxiety

As can be seen from Table 3, an inverse relationship was found between empathy and emotion recognition ($r = -.279$, $p \leq 0.05$). These results demonstrate the relationship between empathy, understanding of other people’s emotions, and emotion recognition. High empathy correlates with high emotion recognition, or conversely, high emotional recognition is associated with developed empathy.

A direct relationship was found between general emotional intelligence (integrative emotional intelligence) and situational anxiety ($r = .486$, $p \leq 0.01$). These results indicate that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and the anxiety caused by a particular stressful situation; therefore, emotional intelligence helps to reduce situational anxiety in stressful situations.

A direct relationship was found between situational anxiety and personal anxiety ($r = .320$, $p \leq 0.05$). The results indicate that there is a relationship between situational and personal anxiety, since an increase in situational anxiety leads to an increase in personal anxiety and vice versa. Thus, the correlation analysis revealed a relationship between emotional intelligence and situational anxiety in teachers.

In general, it can be assumed that the variability of emotional intelligence indicators among teachers belonging to different groups of teaching experience is insignificant. Thus, with the exception of “Conscious Emotional Management,” the variability of almost all components does not show any regularity. It should be noted that this component is most represented in the group of teachers with more than 20 years of experience, which allows us to conclude that real-life experience in interpersonal professional interactions plays a certain role in the development of this ability. The use of a comparative criterion (Kruskal-Wallis H-test for several unrelated samples) also confirmed this difference ($H = 8.69$ at $p \leq 0.05$). Experienced teachers, unlike young teachers, have more developed skills in monitoring and managing their own experiences and are more effective in influencing the emotional states of others.

The hypothesis regarding the specificity of emotional intelligence in male and female teachers was not confirmed. Statistically significant differences (Student’s t-test for two unrelated samples) between these samples were not revealed. Thus, an empirical study of teachers’ abilities to recognize their own and others’ emotions, to understand the causes and dynamics of emotional experiences, and to use emotions to improve performance showed that these skills are present at an average level among the teaching staff, regardless of professional status and place of work, gender, and partly teaching experience. The latter determines the teacher’s ability to manage emotions, which improves with increasing teaching experience.

5. DISCUSSION

Our study showed that there is a significant relationship between the level of emotional intelligence of teachers and the level of anxiety. An increase in emotional intelligence can lead to a decrease in the level of anxiety, or vice versa, an increase in the level of anxiety can lead to a decrease in the level of emotional intelligence.

The conducted studies show that high levels of emotional intelligence are characterized by low levels of reactive and trait anxiety; average emotional intelligence levels are associated with low and moderate levels of anxiety. Low levels of intelligence are associated with high levels of anxiety. They note the increased personal and situational anxiety of teachers, their low stress resistance [12], as well as the rapidly increasing extreme situations in professional activities, which pose a risk to the physical and mental health of this subject of educational interaction [12, 4].

Analysis of anxiety profiles in teachers shows that the personal component of anxiety generally prevails over the situational component. However, the variables in which the highest and lowest values are found coincide [13]. Thus, studies show that teachers most often demonstrate an anxious assessment of potential prospects, which is manifested in persistent anxiety about both the situation and their future. It can be assumed that their anxiety is related to both immediate events and more distant perspectives, manifested in a sense of uncertainty about the future, a sense of hopelessness, and an inability to influence and change events.

The results of this study indicate a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and anxiety. Therefore, it is important to use appropriate training programs with teachers to develop emotional intelligence, which can lead to social development and the development of interpersonal relationships [14, 7].

In a number of studies, we have conducted research. Although there is a correspondence between these facts, in some cases these facts do not coincide. Thus, depending on the aspects of the level of anxiety, that is, depending on personal or situational anxiety, the correlation between emotional intelligence and anxiety level changes [7].

A decrease in the level of emotional intelligence can lead to an increase in the level of aggression. This means that as the level of empathy decreases, the level of aggression increases and the productivity of teacher training activities decreases. A number of researchers have determined that high emotional intelligence can be a protective factor for mental and physical health, and low emotional intelligence can cause serious problems in the individual's behavior [15].

Many studies have investigated the relationship between high levels of empathy and the media [16]. A number of studies are consistent with our study. It has been found that significant gender differences in emotional intelligence are manifested. There are quite a few studies of this kind, and each of them has overlapping findings [17].

Our studies have shown that the higher the ability of teachers to regulate external and internal manifestations of emotions, which are subcomponents of emotional intelligence, the less likely they are to react to external and internal stimuli. Also, the higher the ability to control emotions, the lower the reaction of resentment and hostility toward people around them [18].

The higher the ability to control emotions and manage the internal state of the personality, the less hostility is observed in the behavior and actions of students. The study showed the relationship between emotional intelligence and the index of aggression. The ability to control emotional manifestations allows them to show less aggression toward people around them.

The higher the level of control over emotions, the less aggressive the reactions to external influences. It was found that the higher the level of development of intrapersonal emotional intelligence indicators, the lower the level of hatred toward different people. The higher the ability to understand and manage emotions, the less hostility appears in the actions of the participants. At the same time, an analysis of various studies has shown that high indicators of the development of intrapersonal intelligence help students become less aggressive.

The more developed the ability to control one's own and others' emotions, to express emotions that are appropriate in certain situations, the less likely one is to react aggressively to the stimuli that arise. A high level of emotions and managing the emotional state of other people reduces hostility toward others. The higher the ability to control one's own and other people's emotions, as well as their understanding, the less likely one is to manifest aggression toward stimuli.

The higher the level of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence, the fewer hostile reactions teachers have toward others. The more indicators of intrapersonal emotional intelligence are developed in teachers, the fewer hostile reactions they have in their actions. The higher the level of understanding of their own emotional manifestations and the emotions of other people, their control over them, the establishment of causal relationships between the manifestation of emotions and the causes that provoke them, the fewer antipathetic reactions students repeat. Summing up the study and its results, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between indicators of emotional intelligence and the level of anxiety in teachers. These relationships increase further against the background of increased empathy.

6. CONCLUSION

Our research has shown that emotional intelligence is defined as a combination of four skills: accurately assessing and expressing emotions, using emotions in thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Anxiety is used to describe relatively stable individual differences in a person's tendency to feel anxious. A distinction is made between personality anxiety and situational anxiety: trait anxiety is a general personality trait, while situational (reactive) anxiety is a tendency to perceive a wide range of situations as threatening.

Teachers demonstrate a high level of emotional self-awareness, which indicates their ability to understand their internal states and quickly recognize emotions. Evidence has shown that teachers exhibit moderate levels of situational anxiety and high levels of personal anxiety. Teachers are able to cope with anxiety, do not develop the ability to find rational explanations for their problems, and have difficulty reducing their feelings of anxiety. The study showed that teachers demonstrate a high level of personal anxiety, which indicates that they cannot find a solution in stressful and critical life situations and, in some cases, can create a factor of emotional exhaustion. Such a situation negatively affects the effectiveness and productivity of training.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the conducted study is consistent with a number of studies, there are a number of limitations. These limitations are primarily related to the fact that fewer respondents were involved in the study during the selection process, as well as to the fact that only one university was covered. The data are based on the answers to test questions related to the study of the impact of emotional intelligence requirements on their level of aggression within the university. At the same time, the randomness of the selection, the lack of a well-established methodology for emotional intelligence, and the diversity of research in this field complicated the research process.

The data were collected within a limited period of time and were accompanied by a limited number of participants. However, the results obtained in this study can strengthen existing approaches in this field in a specific national-ethnic environment and cultural context and provide different perspectives for future studies in terms of quantitative analysis with a larger sample size. It can also be the basis for making suggestions for future studies within the framework of a new methodological approach, that is, not through the traditional way of releasing aggression, but through the development of emotional intelligence.

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