Emotional Intelligence: Its Role in Managing Stress and Anxiety in Elementary School Teachers at Workplace

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Abstract

The study seeks to explain the role that emotional intelligence plays in managing stress and anxiety in elementary school teachers at their workplace .100 elementary school teachers from Saidy Salim Sector, Kafr EL Sheikh Governorate, Egypt were taken for the study. Emotional Intelligence Scale, Stress Inventory and General Anxiety test were used for the measurement of all the variables. Descriptive statistics, Correlation and Regression analysis were used for data Analysis. Results indicate that there was a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and the variables of Stress and Anxiety. Stress management component and anxiety component; emerge as statistically significant with respect to the relationship with Emotional Intelligence.

Keywords ; Emotional Intelligence , stress, anxiety , elementary school teachers

Introduction

Over the last decade Emotional Intelligence (EI) has drawn significant interest from academics and HR practitioners throughout the world. The development of emotional intelligence skills is important because it is an area that is generally overlooked when skills development programs are designed. And yet research shows that emotions, properly managed, can drive trust, loyalty, and commitment. Many of the greatest productivity gains, innovations, and accomplishments of individuals, teams, and organisations have occurred within such a framework (Cooper, 1997).

Emotional intelligence is a social intelligence that enables people to recognise their own, and other peoples' emotions. Moreover, emotional intelligence enables people to differentiate those emotions, and to make appropriate choices for thinking and action (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Mayer and Salovey, 1993). It is an intelligence that may be learned, developed and improved (Perkins, 1994; Sternberg, 1996).

According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence includes an "ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". A related definition adds the "ability to adaptively recognize emotion, express emotion, regulate emotion and harness emotions" (Schutte et al., 1998). Personal or emotional intelligence has been found to vary by age or developmental level and gender (Gardner, 1999).

Emotional intelligence may be defined as the ability to use your awareness and sensitivity to discern the feelings underlying interpersonal communication, and to resist the temptation to respond impulsively and thoughtlessly, but instead to act from receptivity, authenticity and candour (Ryback, 1998). At its best, emotional intelligence is about influence without manipulation or abuse of authority. It is about perceiving, learning, relating, innovating, prioritising and acting in ways that take into account and legitimise emotions, rather than relying on logic or intellect or technical analysis alone (Ryback, 1998).

Emotional Intelligence is now being considered to be important in organisational factors such as: organisational change (Ferres & Connell, 2004; Singh, 2003); leadership (Ashkanasy, 2002; Dearborn, 2002; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Weymes, 2003); management performance (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002); perceiving occupational stress (Nicklaou & Tsaousis, 2002; Oginska-Bulik, 2005); and life satisfaction (Palmer, Donaldson & Stough, 2002). To meet organisational ends (Lord, Klimiski, & Kanfer 2002), it is not uncommon to use emotions and emotion related thoughts and behaviour as the ingredients in an institutionalised recipe of emotional culture.

Emotional intelligence has been found to impact on stress (Ciarrochi, Chan & Bajgar, 2001). Ciarrochi, Chan and Caput, (2000), for example, posit that emotional intelligence may protect people from stress and lead to better adaptation. They opine that an objective measure of emotion management skill is associated with a tendency to maintain an experimentally induced positive mood which has obvious implication for preventing stress. Bar-On (2003) found that there was a moderate yet significant relationship between emotional and social intelligence and psychological health. The aspects of emotional and social intelligent competencies that were found to impact on psychological health are: (a) the ability to manage emotion and cope with stress, (b) the drive to accomplish personal goals in order to actualize one's inner potential and lead a more meaningful life and (c) the ability to verify feelings and thinking.

Basic Components of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Thorndike (1920) conceptualized social intelligence as the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, to act wisely in human relations. Building on the work of Thorndike, Gardener (1983) developed the theory of multiple intelligences, wherein he classified intelligence into two namely categories: interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. He described interpersonal intelligence as the ability to understand other people, what motivates them, how they work, and how to work cooperatively with them. He identified teachers, politicians, salespersons, clinicians and religious leaders as individuals who are likely to have a high degree of interpersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence is a correlative ability turned inward. It is a capacity to form a veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life. EI has basic components such as:

Self-awareness : Self-awareness is the heart of emotional intelligence. It is the foundation on which most of the other elements of emotional intelligence are built, the necessary first step toward exploring and coming to understand yourself, and toward change. It is the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives as well as their impact on others. Emotional self-awareness is also about knowing what motivates you, what brings you fulfillment, and what lifts your heart and fills you with energy and aliveness.

Self-regulation : Self-regulation or impulse control is-the ability to regulate your emotions and behavior so that you act appropriately in various situations. It involves resisting or delaying an impulse, drive, and temptation to act, responding versus reacting.

Interpersonal skills : Interpersonal effectiveness involves being empathetic (i.e., being aware of, understanding, and appreciating the feelings of others); being a constructive, cooperative, and contributing member of your social group; and, establishing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships.

Adaptability : Adaptability is the capacity to cope with environmental demands by effectively and realistically sizing up and flexibly dealing with problematic situations. It is the ability to adjust your emotions, thoughts, and behavior to changing situations and conditions.

Stress Tolerance : Stress tolerance is the ability to withstand adverse events, stressful situations, and strong emotions without falling apart but by actively coping with stress.

General Mood and Motivation : Two factors that facilitate emotionally intelligent behavior are optimism and happiness. Optimism is the ability to look at the brighter side of life and to maintain a positive attitude even in the face of adversity. Happiness is the ability to feel satisfied with one's life, to enjoy oneself and others, and to have fun and express a positive mood.

Stress Management and Emotional Intelligence

Stress is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work. It is a generalized non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it. Occupational stress describes physical, mental and emotional wear and tear brought about by incongruence between the requirement of the job and the capabilities, resources and needs of the employee to cope with job demands (Akinboye, Akinboye and Adeyemo, 2002). Occupational stress is pervasive and invasive. Stress in the workplace has assumed increased importance in recent times the world over. In 1992 the United Nations (Akinboye, et al,, 2002) describes "job stress" as the twentieth century disease. In the words of Akinboye et al, (2002) over 70% of employees world-wide describe their jobs as stressful with more than one in five reporting high levels of stress at work on a daily basis.

The relationship between EI and stress management, and the impact this relationship has on overall health and well-being has been a central theme in recent EI research (Salovey,et al., 2002; Graves, 2005; Slaski, 2003). Stress impacts individuals' perspectives at a variety of levels. Global events such as war, political strife, and terrorism have been shown to affect stress perceptions at a societal level. These large and overwhelming stresses are acutely felt by individual members within a society and can have a direct impact on the lives of individual citizens (Hartley, 2004).

Other studies have demonstrated the acute ability stress to negatively impact an individual's environment (Quebbeman, 2002). Whether taken from a macroenvironmental or micro-environmental perspective, EI researchers have attempted to discover relationships between a person's EI level and an ability to manage stress and stressful situations. There is a plethora of research describing the link between EI and stress management, as well as the affect such management might act as a predictor for an individual's overall psychological and physiological health and well-being. In an example of a study that examined the relationship between EI and its psychological impact, 158 college freshmen were assessed for both EI and stress (Gohm, et. al, 2005). It was determined that EI was useful for some members of the participant population in their ability to rationalize and reduce stress; but for others, EI was factored as non-important or unused. Other studies (Nikolaou, 2002; Quebbeman, 2002) determined much stronger relationships between an individual's EI level and reported stress levels.

Studies conducted by Montes-Berges et al., (2007) with nursing students have shown that emotional intelligence is a skill that minimizes the negative stress consequences. They examined the role of perceived emotional intelligence (PEI) measured by the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, in the use of stress-coping strategies, in the quantity and quality of social support and in the mental health of nursing students. The results indicated positive correlations between clarity and social support, social support and repair, and social support and mental health. Hierarchy regression analysis pointed out that clarity and emotional repair are predictors of social support, and emotional repair is the main predictor of mental health. These results show the importance of PEI in stress coping within the nursing framework.

Naidoo et al., (2008) has conducted a survey to gain some understanding of the explanatory factors for stress and an evaluation of the role that emotional intelligence (EI) plays in the experience of perceived stress (PS). It also aimed to compare EI and PS and explore the association between academic background, satisfaction with career choice and EI, and PS in first year dental students. The Survey was conducted on 43 male and 55 female students, Results of Correlation analysis between EI and PS indicated a statistically significant inverse relationship between EI and PS. Stepwise regression analysis identified significant predictors of PS as gender, previous higher education qualification, satisfaction with decision to study dentistry and EI. The t statistic indicates that EI is relatively the most important predictor of PS. The finding revealed that low EI is associated the stress.

Accordingly , the strength of an organization can be greatly increased through the application of training programs which include EI skills. Research has determined that organizations which

have implemented such programs have demonstrated increased trust and individual contribution (Jain, 2005; Jordan and Troth, 2004). A central theme threaded through a large majority of the literature on EI's effect on health and well-being is that higher levels of EI have most often correlated positively to good health and negatively to physically and psychologically destructive behaviors.

Anxiety and emotional intelligence

The basis for the proposed association between higher emotional intelligence and lower anxiety lies primarily on the hypnotized and identified relationships between emotional intelligence and better coping and the corresponding correlations between higher coping and lower anxiety . Such literature has suggested that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better able to manage and cope with daily life hassles by being better able to regulate and manage their emotions . Better coping has further been related to lower anxiety .

Research on emotional intelligence and anxiety, reported that emotional intelligence was generally negatively correlated to anxiety . For example ,Head (20020 , and David (2002) (Both cited by Brackett and Salovey, 2004) have both reported low correlations between the MSCEIT (Total) and STAI (r= -.29 and r= -.31 , respectively) . In relation to self – report EI measures , Salovey et al. (2002) have found social anxiety (as assessed by the Social Anxiety subscale of the Self- Conscious Scale) to be low –to- moderately and negatively correlated with the Clarity (r=-.30) and repair (r= -.37) subscales of the TMMS , although the Attention subscale was low , but positively correlated (r= .11, N=108) . Additionally , Tsaousis and Nikolaou (2005) found scores on their Traits Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire to be low – to – moderately and negatively correlated with the anxiety subscale of the General Health Questionnaire (Perception :r=.20, Control : r= -,42, Utilisation : r= -.27, Understanding : r=-.17 ; N=365) . Furthermore , Furnham et al. (2003) have found highly anxious individuals to have the lowest scores on emotional intelligence in comparison to responsive or low anxiety individuals in a sample of 259 university students .

Aim of the research

The main purpose of this study was to examine the role of Emotional Intelligence in managing Stress and Anxiety in elementary school teachers.

Methods

Participants

One- hundred (26 females, and 74 males) elementary school teachers from Saidy Salim Sector, Kafr EL Sheikh Governorate, Egypt were taken for the study. The participants ranged from 25 to 43 years of age (M = 38.5).

Measures

1. Emotional Intelligence Scale . The Emotional Intelligence Scale was developed by Schutte et al. (1998). It is a 33-item scale with a five-point Likert-type scale. As suggested in Salovey and Mayer's theory of emotional intelligence (1990), the instrument has three categories: (a) the appraisal and expression of emotion assessed by 13 items; (b) the regulation of emotion assessed by 10 items; and (c) the utilisation of emotion assessed by 10 items. Participants read each statement and decide whether they 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', are 'undecided', 'agree', or 'strongly agree' with the statement.

Schutte et al. (1998) reported a Cronbach alpha (α) of 0.90 for the internal consistency for adults with mean age of 29.3 (S.D. = 10.2) and α = 0.78 for test-retest reliability after a two-week

interval on the scale for a smaller group drawn from the sample. Schutte et al. (1998) reported predicted validity of r(63) = 0.32 for first year GPA of college students, for discriminant validity they reported r(41) = - 0.06 for the correlation between the scale and SAT scores, and r(22) = - 0.28 to 0.54 for subscales of NEO Personality Inventory of scores of college students.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI): The STAI is a 40-item self-report inventory that measures state and trait anxiety (Spielberger et al., 1970). Items assess how a participant general feels (trait) and her experience of anxiety at a particular moment (state). Test-retest reliability for the trait measure ranges from 0.73 to 0.86 for periods from 1 hour to 104 days in a group of college undergraduates (Spielberger et al., 1970). As expected, the test-retest reliability for the state measure is much lower, ranging from 0.16 to 0.54 (Spielberger et al., 1970). Internal consistency for both trait (STAI-T) and state (STAI-S) measures is good, ranging from 0.83 to 0.92 (Spielberger et al., 1970). The STAI also has good concurrent and construct validity (Spielberger et al., 1970).

Stress Perceived Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarak, & Mermelstein, 1983). There are three versions of the PSS: one with 4, one with 10, and one with 14 items. The version we used has 14 items and is rated on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very frequently). Scores of items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13 are reversed. Higher scores correspond to higher perceived stress.

Results

Regression Analysis, Descriptive statistics and Pearson Correlation were also used. The results of various analyses have been presented in separate headings.

1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the Mean and standard deviations of all the observed variables. Descriptive statistics was worked out to know the pattern of score distribution. A perusal of table 1 reveals that the mean score on Anxiety variable is 12.2 with the standard deviation of 3.7. The mean score on Stress is 25.3 with the SD of 2.9 and on Emotional Intelligence (EI) the mean score was 128.16 with the SD of 2.8. It shows that the scores on Anxiety variable ranged Average and Normal. Similarly on Stress and Emotional Intelligence variables the score ranges average and above average but normal.

Table 1 –Mean and Std. Deviation

Variables	Mean	SD
Anxiety	12.2	3.7
Stress	25.3	2.9
Emotional Intelligence	128.16	2.8

2. Correlations

Correlations among all the 3 variables were computed through Pearson's Product Movement method. It was aimed at examining the degree of association between the measures of Anxiety, Stress and Emotional Intelligence. A careful inspection of inter-correlation matrix (Table - 2) reveals that all the variables correlate significantly with each other. The inter-correlation between Anxiety and stress is .710, which is significant at 0.001 probability level. It shows that the people who are having high stress are having more chances to develop anxiety. It can also be said that the stress can be the root cause of developing Anxiety in a person. The correlation between the measures of Anxiety and Emotional intelligence is also significant. The inter - correlation between the both is -.667, which is significant at .001probability level. Here the

correlation between the both is negative but significant which shows that the people with low EQ (Emotional Intelligence) are having high anxiety, so it can be said that there is a negative association between the both. The correlation between stress and Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is negative but significant. The inter-correlation between the both is -.547 which is also significant at .001 probability level. It shows that people who are highly emotionally intelligent are having less probability to get stressed.

Table 2 – Inter- Correlation Matrix

Variables	Anxiety	Stress	Emotional Intelligence
Anxiety	**1.00**	**.710****	**-.667****
Stress	**.710****	**1.00**	**-.547****
Emotional Intelligence	**-.667****	**-.547****	**1.00**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

3. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was computed to assess the strength of relationship between dependent variable and a set of independent variables. Regression Analysis provides an opportunity with little ambiguity to assess the importance of each of the predictors to the overall relationship. The results of regression analysis for the dependent variable Emotional Intelligence (EI) are presented in table 3. It is clear from the results that the regression analysis accepted both (Anxiety and stress) the variables as a significant predictor of Emotional Intelligence. In Overall both the predictors contributed Multiple R of .675. The F ratio computed for the significance of multiple R is 48.98, which is significant at .001 probability level.

Table 3 Final Summary of Regression Analysis Dependent Variable: Emotional intelligence

Multiple R	.675		Df	SS	MS
R Square	.456	Regression	**2**	**6468.17**	**3234.08**
Adjusted R Square	.446	Residual	**117**	**7724.75**	**66.02**
Standard Error	8.125	**F**	**48.98**	**P**	**<.001**

Variables in the Equation

Variables	B	SEB	Beta	t	P
Anxiety	**-3.34**	**.592**	**-.562**	**-5.804**	**.001**
Stress	**-9.28**	**.061**	**-.147**	**-1.52**	**.131**

Conclusion

In summary , the findings from this study indicate that the low and high level of Emotional Intelligence establish relationship to some extent with stress and anxiety. Negative correlation of

Emotional Intelligence with stress and Anxiety highlights that emotional intelligence will prove helpful tool in dealing with stress and anxiety.

The studies conducted by Oginska et al., (2005), Matthews et al., (2006), Montes-Berges et al., (2007), Naidoo et al., (2008) etc, also reveals similar results. So it can be said that 'emotional intelligence,' is the ability to restrain negative feelings such as anger, self-doubt, stress, anxiety and instead focus on positive ones such as confidence, empathy and congeniality. So one should emphasize on developing emotional intelligent to overcome stress and anxiety at workplace and to get success in life.

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