

Emotional Intelligence in Primary School Teachers: The Effect of Gender, Age and Tenure

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Abstract

Teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) is a significant skill, which has attracted researchers' attention in the last years, as it is connected with increased efficiency and professional well-being. In order to investigate primary school teachers' emotional intelligence we conducted a study on a sample of 109 teachers. The aim was to investigate whether EI is affected by demographic variables such as age, sex and years of teaching experience. For the collection of data we used self-reference questionnaires based on the emotional intelligence questionnaire—GalaEmo Test, which has been validated for the Greek population. The results showed that EI is unaffected by age, sex and years of teaching experience. These particular results lead us to a multifactorial justification of EI and to the conclusion that other factors should be investigated. All in all, we consider it important to create educational intervention programs with the aim of developing teachers' emotional intelligence.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, Education, Age, Sex, Years of Teaching Experience

1. Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is characterized as the ability which enables people to differentiate types of feelings, both their own and those of others, to use strategy mechanisms to decipher them in order to control and form their mindset. The term became widely known in 1995 when Goleman (2011) supported that EQ is more important than IQ. Over the last few years we have observed an increased tendency of social sciences to investigate teachers' emotional intelligence concerning their efficiency in their professional duties as well as their personal well-being (Pena, Ray, & Extremera, 2012). As a result a number of studies have reached qualitative conclusions.

With regard to the principal study elements taken from the world literature, we are led to believe that primary school teachers have increased levels of emotional intelligence and are more effective in their work environment. Prior to that, in their study, [Pena, Ray and Extremera \(2012\)](#) studied a total of 349 teachers after random selection (104 pre-school and 245 primary schools, of whom 92 were men and 257 women). Results showed that the teachers who had high scores of emotional intelligence tended to be more effective and possessed more motives to engage in the educational practice. In relation to sex, it was observed that women were more emotionally involved with their students than men ([Brody & Hall, 1993](#)). The above is collaborated by the research of [Vasiou \(2018\)](#) on a sample of 199 teachers at first and a sample of 98 later on. The findings showed that teachers with increased emotional intelligence respond more positive to their job and feel greater satisfaction in the school environment. Moreover, in a study conducted among teachers ([Ghanizadeh & Moatian, 2010](#)) it was found that emotional intelligence is directly related to teaching experience. In particular, it increased over time and years of service resulting in effectiveness and success in their work.

Furthermore, [Fiorilli et al., \(2019\)](#) in a study conducted in Italy on a sample of 318 teachers, mostly primary school ones, reached similar conclusions. They highlighted that increased levels of emotional intelligence are related to professional well-being and a sense of effectiveness.

In another study conducted in India researchers came to the conclusion that a teacher with increased emotional intelligence perceives their students' feelings and is instrumental in their emotional and social development. They recognize their needs, respond more effectively and understand what motivates each student so as to achieve the best educational results ([Ramana, 2013](#)).

Moreover, in a study conducted on 123 special needs teachers, 47 men and 76 women, aged 23 - 55 ranging from 1 to 23 years of teaching experience, they concluded that teachers with increased emotional intelligence acquire more satisfaction from their profession. From demographic characteristics, only sex seemed to affect one of the factors of emotional intelligence and in particular women reported greater ability to manage the emotions of others compared to men, while age and teaching experience did not seem to influence emotional intelligence or any of its factors ([Platsidou, 2010](#)). These results are in direct conflict with others such as those by [Bar-On \(1997\)](#) who supported that women presented significantly higher emotional intelligence compared to men. The same applies to the research by [Pau & Croucher \(2003\)](#) and [Schutte et al. \(1998\)](#) who showed that emotional intelligence increased over time.

[Fernández-Berrocal, Gutiérrez-Cobo, Rodríguez-Corrales, & Cabello \(2017\)](#) highlighted that teaching experience is a strong indicator that can influence teachers' emotional intelligence and their effectiveness as a result, owing to their inability to manage emotions. All in all, it is of utmost importance that all the above research concluded that there is a need to improve levels of emotional intelligence recommending the creation of educational intervention programs to rein-

force emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence plays a very important role in raising environmental awareness among all individuals in the society. In fact emotional intelligence is defined as emotional awareness and emotional management skill which provide the ability to balance emotion and reason so as to maximize productivity and happiness. Therefore, a proper management of emotional intelligence is necessary for all teachers to get rid from all environment related problems. Emotionally balanced teachers can only develop a wave of awareness among the people towards environment. They can aware the society that all the resources of environment are exhaustible and if we will not use these resources properly we are going to face many troubles in future. Moreover, emotionally balanced teachers can only develop a sense of awareness towards other people in the school environment. Finally, emotionally intelligent teachers can encourage people to reach their true potential (Sharma, 2014).

The aim of the present study was to investigate emotional intelligence levels in Primary School Teachers in Greece.

1.1. Research Questions-Hypotheses

Emotional intelligence is the dependent variable while demographics (age, sex, years of teaching experience) is the independent one.

Question 1: Does gender influence levels of emotional intelligence?

H1: Gender does not influence levels of emotional intelligence.

H2: Gender influences levels of emotional intelligence.

Question 2: Does age influence levels of emotional intelligence?

H1: Age does not influence levels of emotional intelligence.

H2: Age influences levels of emotional intelligence.

Question 3: Do years of teaching experience influence levels of emotional intelligence?

H1: As years of teaching experience increase levels of emotional intelligence remain unaffected.

H2: As years of teaching experience increase levels of emotional intelligence are affected.

1.2. Research Purpose

The aim of the research was to investigate primary school teachers' emotional intelligence in relation to demographic variables, age, sex and years of teaching experience given that such research in Greece are limited. The findings could be implemented in order to develop suitable educational intervention programs to reinforce emotional intelligence.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The choice of the sample was random, which means that those primary school

teachers who were available at the time participated. As a result, the findings lacked generalization. In the present study, 109 primary school teachers participated, 46 of whom were men and 63 women from various cities in Greece, aged 21 - 60.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

1) Demographic information concerning age, sex, level of education and years of teaching experience.

2) Emotional Intelligence questionnaire GalaEmo Test. This questionnaire evaluates emotional Intelligence based on the 5 pillars, self-awareness, self-control, personal motives, empathy and social skills. The test includes 121 questions evaluated on the 7 Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The highest total score corresponds to high levels of emotional intelligence. The test has been validated on a Greek sample from various specialities in Greece and possesses satisfactory psychometric qualities. In particular the credibility of internal reference of the Cronbacha scale is 0.8979.

2.3. Procedure

For the conduction of the study we followed quantitative descriptive field research with certain questionnaires and statistical methods which elicited numerical results in relation to the variables that were investigated. The study was conducted in various cities in Greece from 23rd March to 27th March and was carried out online. The sample was chosen at random and the processing of the results was done with the program SPSSStatistics. Our purpose, as researchers, was to investigate the correlation between demographic characteristics with emotional intelligence in primary school teachers and the implementation of intervention programs to further reinforce it.

3. Results

For the research results we used the statistical program SPSS Vol 23. As far as descriptive statistics are concerned we have the distribution of demographic variables i.e. age, sex and years of teaching experience as well as the distribution of the TOTAL EQ variable.

Based on **Table 1**, as regards gender 42.2% i.e. 46 were men while the remaining 57.8% (63) were women.

Based on **Table 2** and **Figure 1**, the average age was 35 years. The standard deviation was 11.789. That means that the research was based on a relatively young sample of teachers.

Based on **Table 3** the biggest percentage of teachers worked for 5 years while we noticed low percentages in the groups 6 - 10 years and 16 - 20 years. In total, more than 50% of the sample had up to 10 years of teaching experience.

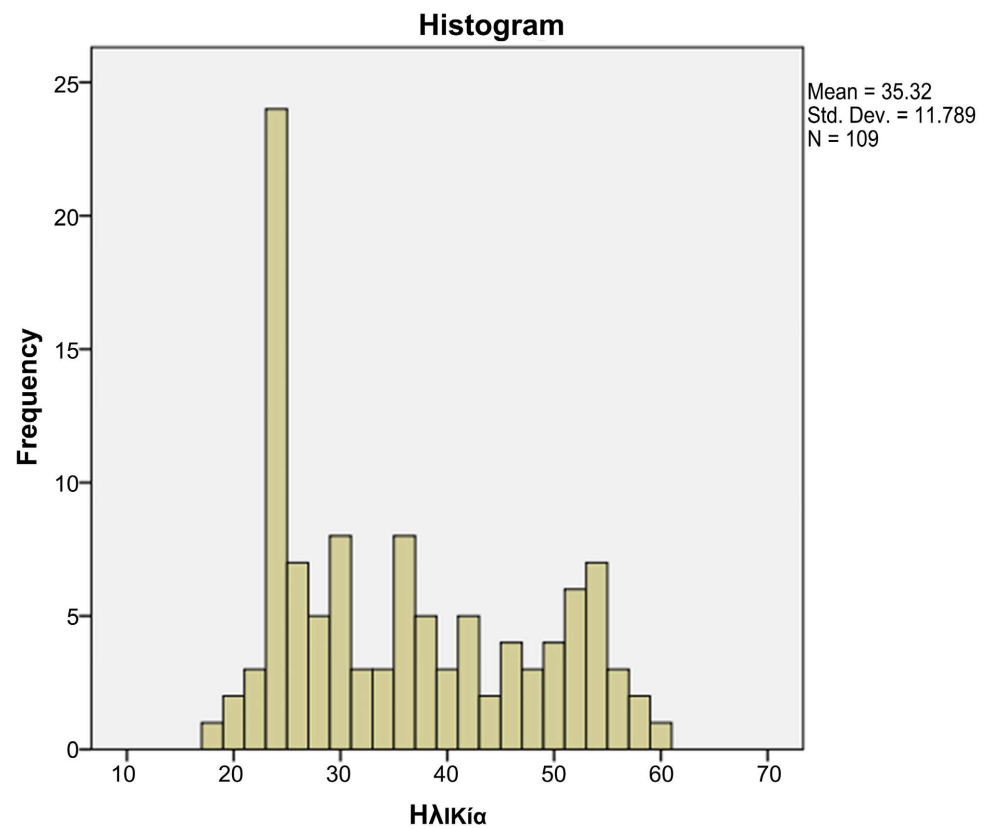
Based on **Table 3** the distribution is a regular Gours distribution. That means that most total scores are close to the average and the least are close to the extreme values.

Table 1. Gender distribution in the sample of 109 individuals.

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Man	46	42.2	42.2	42.2
	Woman	63	57.8	57.8	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Age distribution in the sample of 109 individuals.

Statistics		
Age		
N	Valid	109
	Missing	0
	Mean	35.32
	Median	33.00
	Mode	23
	Std. Deviation	11.789
	Variance	138.979
	Range	42

**Figure 1.** Age distribution in the sample of 109 individuals.

We calculated the Spearman Rho index in regard to the relationship between gender and Emotional Intelligence. Based on the results on **Table 4**, the correlation was equal to 0.09. This particular correlation is close to zero and we accept this hypothesis for the research question. Thus gender does not influence levels of emotional intelligence. As shown in the table statistical significance is $p = 0.36$ so the correlation between gender and emotional intelligence is not statistically important.

We calculated the Pearson r index for the relationship between age and emotional intelligence. Based on the results on **Table 5**, the correlation is $r = 0.19$.

Table 3. Distribution of years of teaching experience in the sample of 109 individuals.

		Years of teaching experience			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 - 5	53	48.6	48.6	48.6
	6 - 10	9	8.3	8.3	56.9
	11 - 15	12	11.0	11.0	67.9
	16 - 20	9	8.3	8.3	76.1
	21+	26	23.9	23.9	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Correlation analysis of gender to emotional intelligence.

		Correlations		
			SUM	Gender
Spearman's rho		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.089
	SUM	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.358
		N	109	109
		Correlation Coefficient	0.089	1.000
	Sex	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.358	.
		N	109	109

Table 5. Correlation analysis of age with emotional intelligence.

		Correlations		
			SUM	Age
SUM		Pearson Correlation	1	0.193*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.044
		N	109	109
Age		Pearson Correlation	0.193*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.044	
		N	109	109

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This particular correlation is relatively low and statistically significant. As a result, a person's age does not affect levels of emotional intelligence. Statistical significance is $p = 0.04$ ($p < 0.05$) and suggests statistically significant correlation but is of no concern as there is a low correlation between age and emotional intelligence.

We calculated the Spearman Rho index regarding the relationship between years of experience and emotional Intelligence. Based on the results on **Table 6**, the correlation was $r = 0.09$. This particular value is near to zero. Therefore we accept zero hypothesis where, as years of teaching experience increase, levels of emotional intelligence are unaffected. Statistical significance is $p = 0.37$, so the correlation is not statistically significant.

4. Discussion

The results of the study showed that the three demographic variables, age, sex and years of teaching experience do not affect emotional intelligence. More specifically, we accept the null hypothesis for every variable. Lack of contingency between gender and EI can be interpreted by the fact that over the past years women have become to a large extent autonomous and powerful. Women have undertaken many roles such as that of mother, wife and worker and as a result their needs come second and behave more mechanically. Men on the other hand, are far from the stereotypical notions of the past and have become more active in social settings. Moreover, as far as the upbringing of children is concerned, they are more involved and not just passive observers. In addition, a basic requirement for the development of EI is the person's environment (social, familial, school), and it is formed through experience and personality and it does not change significantly over time. Age and years of experience are as a result connected and do not affect significantly the development of EI. The working conditions and the undermining of the educational practice limit freedom of speech, creativity and imagination. Undoubtedly, another reason lies on salary dependency and the absence of evaluation for teachers. Therefore, there are no motives for further development. Finally frequent changes in the work environment

Table 6. Correlation analysis of years of teaching experience with emotional intelligence.

		Correlations		
		SUM	Years of Experience	
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.087	
	SUM	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.	
		N	109	
		Correlation Coefficient	0.087	1.000
	Years of experience	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.367	.
		N	109	109

do not allow for the development of stable and meaningful relations among the teaching staff.

However, according to previous studies, demographic characteristics have proven to affect levels of emotional intelligence. Prior to that as far as gender is concerned, it was found to influence EI. In particular, women present with higher levels of EI than men (Bar-On, 1997; Brody & Hall, 1993; Platsidou, 2010). The findings on the years of teaching experience seem to differ as some studies have found correlations with EI (Fernández-Berrocal, Gutiérrez-Cobo, Rodríguez-Corrales, & Cabello, 2017; Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2010) while others have not found any correlations (Platsidou, 2010). Finally, regarding age, the results of the studies seem to differentiate as well. In certain studies, it seems that over time EI increases (Pau & Croucher, 2003; Schutte et al., 1998) while in others there is no correlation between age and EI (Platsidou, 2010).

Based on the study results concerning the correlation of age, gender and years of teaching experience with levels of emotional intelligence, it is evident that EI is unaffected by these factors. As a result certain practices that can be applied with the aim of obtaining further results are to implement intervention techniques for both genders so as to gather more responses on a larger sample. In this way, a larger sample will be evaluated and the responses will be more indicative. The collection of such data plays a constructive role in society as it is instrumental in understanding the use of research methods, since emotional intelligence can be taught and developed throughout a person's life. Moreover the findings can be used by organizations and various research centers in order to create questionnaires to be used in hiring staff.

The limitation of the present study was the available time for the completion of the questionnaire. As it was an online questionnaire, access to it was restricted by time. The result was that some of the participants were unable to complete it within the specified time. Furthermore, the research was conducted during the pandemic which meant that working conditions were a far cry from the usual ones owing to online teaching, affecting adversely the results of the levels of EI. At the same time there was not an adequate number of special needs teachers so as to reflect accurately on the results. Finally sample size and representativeness is an issue to be addressed.

Along with the limitations of the study, we need to highlight the importance of conducting further research in order to obtain more valid results. Firstly, a larger sample should be used in order to cover the complete teaching staff and not only teachers but also physical educators, music teachers, special needs teachers etc. Moreover, the materialization of future studies should be carried out in their actual working environment, where teachers are unaffected by other factors. Finally, it would be interesting to study the extent to which salary, organizational culture, legislation framework, working conditions and relationships with the supervisor affect the relationship of gender, age and tenure to emotional intelligence.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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