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A Study of Relationship Between Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and Work Stress: A Case Study in Shandong Industrial Technician College

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Abstract

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This study investigates the relationships between emotional intelligence and work stress among teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College. In order to examine such relationship, a survey method with 194 teachers selected by simple random sampling method is used in this study. Findings indicate that the teachers exhibit a high level of emotional intelligence, especially the Self-Awareness, and a medium level of work stress, primarily from Intrinsic Work Factors. A weak significant negative correlation between teachers' emotional intelligence and work stress levels was identified, with the emotional intelligence component of Self-Regulation showing the strongest inverse relationship with work stress. These results suggest that higher emotional intelligence could contribute to lower levels of work stress among teachers, underscoring the importance of emotional skills in educational environments.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Work Stress, Vocational School in China

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Introduction

Since Selye (1956) first introduced stress as a physiological and psychological concept, work stress, as a kind of stress, has not only received attention from the public from a health perspective, but also companies, schools and other organizations have realized its importance to management. How to minimize the negative effects of work stress becomes an area of interest and study for researchers, Fteiha and Awwad (2020) highlight in their study that the presence of emotional intelligence can help employees to manage their work stress.

As the 21st century progresses, knowledge increasingly drives economic development, highlighting the significance of higher education and its faculty. Higher education institutions, particularly vocational colleges and universities are pivotal in meeting societal and industry talent demands. This necessitates a swift response from these institutions to adapt to societal and industry changes. Currently, China hosts the world's largest vocational education system, with Shandong Industrial Technician College as a case in point. Established in 1978 in Weifang, Shandong, it is a government-approved, full-time technical college under the Shandong Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security. Faculty members face pressures not only from their workplace but also from interactions with colleagues, students, and parents, reflecting broader social challenges (Ozoemena et al., 2021).

This study explores the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and work stress, establishes a research framework to investigate their relationship. According to the research framework, researcher designs a survey questionnaire. 194 teachers of Shandong Industrial Technician College participate the survey questionnaires, quantitative and statistical analysis are used in this study to well answer the main objective of this study:

Objectives

The purposes of this study are:

1. To examine the level of emotional intelligence among teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College.

2. To assess the level of work stress experienced by teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College.

3. To investigate the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their work stress levels.

The investigation into the relationship between teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) and work stress addresses a critical gap in both theoretical and practical knowledge. It aims at enhancing educators' job satisfaction, educational quality, and institutional practices at Shandong Industrial Technician College and potentially across the broader educational landscape. This study posits that understanding the dynamics between EI and work stress among teachers can forge pathways to ameliorating stress and bolstering overall teacher well-being. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform and improve the management of work stress among vocational educators, thereby enhancing their quality of life and teaching effectiveness.

Literature Review and conceptual Framework

Work Stress

The early study of work stress could be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the influence of fatigue on human performance is observed (Taylor, 1911; Gilbreth, 1914). Selye (1956), often regarded as the father of stress, introduced stress as a biological and psychological term, paving the way for theories such as Karasek's (1979) Job Demand-Control (JDC) model and its later expansion, the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model offer alternative perspectives on stress, emphasizing resource loss and the appraisal of situational demands versus personal resources, respectively. Although work stress is widely recognized as leading to burnout, chronic health problems, and decreased employee performance (Maslach et al., 2001), Selye (1974) introduced the concept of "eustress", stating that moderate stress can be adopted as a motivational tool to increase job satisfaction and productivity. These above theories and findings underline the complexity of work stress and its significant implications for occupational health.

Work stress is caused by stress contributing factors, this factor called "stressors." (Salye, 1936). The concept of stressor is well elaborated by Cooper and Marshall (1976) identified six key areas: intrinsic work factors, role in dual careers, career development, organizational structure, interpersonal relations, and external organizational factors, Beehr and Newman (1978) narrowed down stressors to role expectations, job demands, and the internal and external organizational environments, furthermore Financial aspects (Raver & Nishii, 2010), and motivational factors (Karimi & Alipour, 2011), have also been implicated in work stress. Recent guidelines by OSHA (2024) highlight modern stressors, including

job security, access to work tools, fear of retaliation, customer confrontations, and challenges in adapting to new work environments or balancing work-life dynamics.

Emotion and Emotional Intelligence

Historical and contemporary research has extensively explored the multifaceted nature of emotions, from the philosophical inquiries of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Locke to modern psychological investigations. Emotions are recognized as complex experiences with intentional, physiological, and action-inducing dimensions, metaphorically likened to natural forces by Omori (2008).

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI), evolving from early studies on social intelligence by Thorndike (1920), encompasses non-cognitive skills crucial for understanding, managing, and utilizing emotions effectively. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as comprising skills in perceiving, appraising, expressing, and regulating emotions to foster emotional and intellectual growth. Goleman (1998) expanded on this, advocating for EI as a learnable set of competencies vital for exceptional performance and leadership, introducing a mixed model of EI that includes five core competencies: Self-Awareness, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathyn and Social Skills. Petrides (2009) proposed a trait model of EI, focusing on emotional self-perceptions within personality hierarchies. The significance of EI has been recognized in various HRM practices, leadership effectiveness, workplace relationships, mental health, life satisfaction, and professional success, underscoring its importance in personal development and adaptive capabilities in a dynamic work environment (Zeidner et al., 2004; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Carmeli & Gittell., 2009; Salovey et al., 1999; Bar-On, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 Research framework

Research Method

Types of Research

The approach taken for this study is a quantitative research design utilizing survey research methods to ascertain the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence and their work stress. This empirical investigation is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of emotional intelligence as delineated by Goleman (1998) and work stress factors as conceptualized by Cooper and Marshall (1976). These theoretical perspectives guide the operationalization of the variables and are critical to our understanding of the observed relationships.

Population, Samples and Random Sampling Method

In this study, the population is 377 teachers work at Shandong Industrial Technician College (Shandong Industrial Technician College, 2024). The sample is 194 teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College, with the margin of error 5% (Yamane, 1973). The simple random sampling method was utilized in this research

Research instruments

In this research, questionnaires are used as research instruments of data collection. These questionnaires are segmented into 3 parts, 3 items related to the respondents' characteristics, 26 items related to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) and 30 items related to work stress (Cooper and Marshall, 1976).

Assessment of research instrument and data collection

After the questionnaires are reviewed and determined, a pre-testing with a sample of 30 teachers from other vocational colleges at Weifang is piloted, and its reliability is analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha statistic that its overall reliability is 0.92 (Cronbach & Furby, 1970).

The researcher collected data by distributing questionnaires to 194 teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College, followed by verifying the responses' completeness and analyzing the data using software package.

Statistical methods

The study analyzes respondents' characteristics through frequency and percentage, emotional intelligence and work stress levels using mean and standard deviation, and explores the relationship between emotional intelligence, factors of EI and work stress via Pearson's correlation analysis.

Finding and Results

Results about Respondents in this study

The researcher analyzes the data of teachers who participated the questionnaire, including gender, age and years of work experience. Frequency and percentage analysis of the data are performed. The results are shown in Table below

Table 1 : Respondents' Characteristics

	Frequencies	%
Gender		
Male	84	43.3%
Female	110	56.7%
Total	194	100.0%
Age	Frequencies	%
20-30	60	30.9%
31-40	89	45.9%
41-50	22	11.3%
51 and above	23	11.9%
Total	194	100.0%
Years of work experience	Frequencies	%
Less than 1 year	10	5.2%
1 - 3 years	38	19.6%
3 - 5 years	29	14.9%
More than 5 years	117	60.3%
Total	194	100.0%

From Table 1, it is found that the data of the 194 respondents who participated in the questionnaire are as follows: In the survey respondents, more female respondents than males, constituting 56.7% (110 individuals) and 43.3% (84 individuals), respectively. For the age field, most of respondents falls within the 31-40, making up 45.9% (89 individuals), followed by the 20-30 age group at 30.9% (60 individuals), the 41-50 range at 11.3% (22 individuals), and those aged 51 and above at 11.9% (23 individuals). When examining years of work experience, 60.3% (117 individuals) have over

than five years of experience. This is succeeded by those with 1-3 years of experience at 19.6% (38 individuals), those with 3-5 years at 14.9% (29 individuals), and individuals with less than one year of experience comprising 5.2% (10 individuals).

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of Emotional Intelligence, overall and all factors.

Emotional Intelligence	n = 194		Level of EI
	$\bar{x}$	sd.	
Self-Awareness	4.39	0.56	Very high
Self-Regulation	4.24	0.69	Very high
Motivation	4.34	0.60	Very high
Empathy	4.38	0.56	Very high
Social Skills	4.36	0.60	Very high
Total Average	4.33	0.54	Very high

The Table 2 shows that emotional intelligence level of teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College is at the Very high level ($\bar{x}$= 4.33). The factor which has the highest mean value is Self-Awareness ($\bar{x}$ = 4.39) that suggests teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College possess a very high level of awareness regarding their emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and the effects of their actions on others. The lowest mean value, Self-Regulation ($\bar{x}$= 4.24), although still indicating a very high level, suggests a slightly lower proficiency in managing emotions, impulses, and resources. In the context of teaching, enhancing self-regulation skills could further improve classroom management, decision-making, and adaptability to changing situations or stressors.

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation of Work Stress, overall and all factors.

Work Stress	n = 194		Level
	$\bar{x}$	sd.	
Intrinsic Work Factors	3.22	1.09	Medium
Dual Roles	3.10	0.94	Medium
Career Development	2.95	1.09	Medium
Relationships at Work	2.72	1.10	Medium
Organizational Structure	2.79	1.17	Medium
Extra-organizational Stressors	2.99	1.07	Medium
Total Average	2.96	0.95	Medium

In Table 3, the assessment of work stress among teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College indicates a medium level of stress ($\bar{x}$= 2.96). The highest mean value, attributed to the factor of Intrinsic Work Factors ($\bar{x}$ = 3.22), indicates that internal aspects related to the nature of the work itself significantly contribute to teachers' stress levels. Conversely, the lowest mean value, identified in the factor of Relationships at Work ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), suggests that interpersonal relationships within the workplace have a comparatively lower impact on teacher's stress levels.

Table 4 Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Work Stress

		Emotional Intelligence	Work Stress
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.235**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	194	194
Work Stress	Pearson Correlation		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N		194

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table 4 shows that the work stress level has a weak negative relationship (r=-0.235) with emotional intelligence level of teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College, at the statistically significant level of 0.01.

Table 5 Correlation between Factors of Emotional Intelligence and Work Stress Please, add Sig(2-tailed) in the table.

		Self-Awareness	Self-Regulation	Motivation	Empathy	Social Skills	Work Stress
Self-Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	0.667**	0.695**	0.648**	0.617**	-0.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.128
	N		194	194	194	194	194
Self-Regulation	Pearson Correlation		1	0.857**	0.783**	0.809**	-0.269**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N			194	194	194	194
Motivation	Pearson Correlation			1	0.846**	0.814**	-0.236**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				<.001	<.001	<.001
	N				194	194	194
Empathy	Pearson Correlation				1	0.879**	-0.221**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					<.001	0.002
	N					194	194
Social Skills	Pearson Correlation					1	-0.209**
	Sig. (2-tailed)						0.004
	N						194
Work Stress	Pearson Correlation						1
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						194

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Table 5 shows that all the five factors of emotional intelligence have weak negative effect on work stress, Self-Regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social Skills have wake negative relationships at the statistically significant level of 0.01. The factor “Self-Regulation” contributes the highest effect on work stress (r = -0.269, at the statistically significant level of 0.01).

Conclusions Discussions and Recommendations

A Study of the Relationships between Teachers Emotional Intelligence and Work Stress: A Case Study in Shandong Industrial Technician College" is a survey research, collecting data using questionnaires from a sample of 194 teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College. Descriptive statistics are used in this study to analyze the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The correlation of emotional intelligence and work stress is tested by the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Conclusions

The results of this study indicates that teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College have a very high level of emotional intelligence, with an overall mean of 4.33. The component with the highest mean is Self-Awareness, followed by Empathy, Social Skills, Motivation, and Self-Regulation in descending order of mean values.

The results also presents that the teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College has the medium level of work stress, with an overall mean of 2.96. The highest contributing factor to stress is Intrinsic Work Factors, succeeded by Dual Roles, Extra-organizational Stressors, Career Development and Organizational Structure. The factors with the lowest mean values contributing to stress is Relationships at Work.

With this study, the researchers find that the work stress level has a weak negative relationship

(r=-0.235) with emotional intelligence level of teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician College, at the statistically significant level of 0.01. The results of data analysis show that all the five factors of emotional intelligence have weak negative effect on work stress, among which the factor "Self-Regulation" has the highest effect on work stress (r = -0.269, at the statistically significant level of 0.01).

Discussions

Emotional Intelligence

From the study the emotional intelligence of teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College is at a very high level ($\bar{x}$= 4.33). A high level of emotional intelligence is especially necessary for teachers, because it could help the teachers to deal with classroom management, coping with individual student differences, and building positive student-teacher relationships. The research of Brackett et. al. (2011) shows that emotional intelligence, especially in the field of education, has a direct impact on the

quality of teaching and the learning experience of students. The five factors of emotional intelligence - self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation - are critical to promoting a positive educational environment (Rahman et. al., 2024).

Among the five factors of emotional intelligence, the most contributing factor is Self-Awareness ($\bar{x}$ = 4.39). which means that teachers at Shandong Industrial Technician College are strong in recognizing their own emotions and understanding how they affect their thoughts and behavior. High self-awareness is associated with better mental health and life satisfaction, as well as leadership capabilities (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Li, et. al., 2021). Meanwhile, the weakest factor is self-regulation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.24). that is a relative weakness within the teachers. Self-Regulation refers to managing disruptive emotions and impulses, and the ability to stay in control. Lower scores in self-regulation can be associated with stress, burnout, and less effective coping strategies (Gross, 1998; Thompson, 1994; Bakker & de Vries, 2020).

Work Stress

The teacher work stress level at Shandong Industrial Technician College falls within the medium level ($\bar{x}$= 2.96), reflecting that while stress is present, it may not be at a highly detrimental level. Among the factors affecting work stress levels, the most advantageous factor is Relationships at Work ($\bar{x}$= 2.72), which indicates that teachers generally experience positive interactions and connections with their peers at Shandong Industrial Technician College. These healthy work relationships can provide emotional support, facilitate exchange of helpful resources, and promote a sense of belonging and team cohesion. Studies have found that social support at work can act as a protective factor against the development of work-related stress and burnout (Shahwan et. al., 2024). Conversely, the most significant area for improvement is found within the Intrinsic Work Factors ($\bar{x}$= 3.22), suggesting that the essential nature of the work that teachers at the college are engaged in is a notable source of stress. Intrinsic work factors often include aspects such as workload, complexity of tasks, responsibility, and performance pressures, which can significantly affect teachers' stress levels. A substantial body of research has confirmed the link between intrinsic job factors and occupational stress, highlighting the importance of workload management, job role clarity, and task variation in reducing teacher stress (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Agyapong et. al., 2022).

Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Work Stress

In this study, the results of analysis shows that the work stress level has a weak negative relationship with the emotional intelligence level of teachers from Shandong Industrial Technician

College (r= -0.235), at the statistically significant level of 0.01. More detailed, the self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills have weak negative relationship with work stress at the statistically significant level of 0.01; self-awareness has a weak negative relationship with work stress but not at the statistically significant.

A negative correlation means that as teachers' emotional intelligence levels increase, their reported levels of work stress decrease, albeit the correlation is weak. This relationship can be attributed to several facets of emotional intelligence that may play a role in stress management:

1) Self-awareness: Teachers with higher levels of EI may have a better understanding of their own emotions, allowing them to recognize the signs of stress early on and take proactive steps to manage it (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Li, et. al., 2021;). As for self-awareness not showing statistical significance in its relationship with work stress, it could be that while self-awareness is important, it may not directly alleviate stress unless coupled with the ability to act on that awareness, which is facilitated by the other components of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

2) Self-regulation: Higher EI also encompasses the ability to regulate one's emotions, which could help teachers manage emotional responses to stressors in the workplace (Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Bakker & de Vries, 2020).

3) Motivation: Motivated teachers may perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than stressors. This intrinsic motivation can bolster resilience and may lead to increased job satisfaction and reduced perceived work stress (Selye, 1974; Fteiha & Awwad, 2020).

4) Empathy: Teachers with a high level of empathy may better understand and manage the emotions of others, such as students or colleagues, potentially resulting in a less stressful work environment (Goleman, 1995).

5) Social skills: With better EI, teachers likely possess superior social skills that might enable them to seek support from colleagues or superiors, leading to reduced perceptions of stress (Lopes et al., 2004; Shahwan et. al., 2024).

In this study, a weak correlation is found between emotional intelligence and work stress could be due to several reasons:

1. Multiplicity of Stressors: Work stress is multifaceted and often caused by many different factors. In teaching, these can include job demands, lack of resources, student behavior, time pressures, and work-life balance issues. The complex nature of these stressors may diminish the potential impact of EI. (Kyriacou, 2001; Bakker & de Vries, 2020).

2.Ceiling Effect: There might be a limit to how impactful EI can be on stress reduction. Once basic emotional competencies are met, further improvements in EI might not translate into significant stress mitigation (Brackett et.al., 2011).

3. Organizational Culture and work ethic: The organizational environment can also influence the relationship between EI and stress. If a workplace has rigid structures, ineffective communication, or poor leadership, the benefits of EI on stress might be constrained (Goleman et al., 2002). A strong work ethic might influence how individuals perceive and respond to potential stressors. For example, individuals with a strong work ethic might be more engaged and find a sense of purpose in their work, which could mitigate feelings of stress (Mazzola et. al., 2011).

Recommendations for Future Research

Because the research is limited to the teachers of Shandong Industrial Technician College, the research results have its limitations. The prospect is put forward to provide reference for scholars in related research in the future.

1) Extensive Data Collection: Future research could benefit from a broader dataset, including the

data of the teachers from other vocational institutes, to enable more generalized results and to capture the factors may influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and work stress that were not fully addressed herein.

2) Longitudinal Studies: Collecting data over time would allow us to track changes in the relationship between work stress and emotional intelligence and test for causality.

3) Comparative Analysis: Conducting studies across different populations would be pivotal in determining the universality of the findings of relationship between emotional intelligence and work stress, and in identifying context-specific variables.

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