

Research Paper

Teacher Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Classroom Engagement and Student Behavioral Adjustment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the predictive role of teacher emotional intelligence on classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment in secondary schools. Using a predictive correlational design, data were collected from 300 teachers and 900 students across government and private schools. Teacher emotional intelligence was assessed through a standardized inventory, while student engagement and behavioral adjustment were measured using student- and teacher-reported scales. Findings revealed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted both engagement and behavioral adjustment even after controlling for background factors. Classroom engagement partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and behavioral outcomes, indicating that emotionally intelligent teachers promote positive behavior by increasing learner participation. The results affirm that emotional intelligence is a critical teaching competency with direct implications for classroom functioning. The study recommends incorporating emotional-competence training into teacher education and school-based professional development to strengthen classroom management and student outcomes.

Keywords: *teacher emotional intelligence, classroom engagement, student behavioral adjustment, secondary education, predictive study*

Classrooms in the twenty-first century are increasingly diverse and emotionally complex, requiring teachers to possess more than academic and pedagogical knowledge. Emotional intelligence, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), has emerged as a critical teaching competency. Emotionally intelligent teachers are better able to respond sensitively to learner needs, regulate stress, de-escalate conflict, and sustain positive classroom climates (Matthews et al., 2023). Recent research demonstrates that teacher emotional competence improves instructional quality and strengthens teacher–student relationships (Rahman et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). It also supports motivation and minimizes reliance on punitive control through empathy and adaptive communication (Hashmi et al., 2022).

At the student level, engagement and behavioral adjustment are key indicators of academic success. Engagement, defined as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation in learning (Reyes et al., 2012), is associated with improved comprehension and persistence

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(Lin et al., 2024), while low engagement correlates with absenteeism and poor performance (Bryce et al., 2023). Behavioral adjustment reflects cooperation, emotional control, and reduced disruptive behavior (Brackett et al., 2023), yet schools continue to report heightened aggression and withdrawal among adolescents (Roy et al., 2023). Evidence suggests that these outcomes are shaped by the socio-emotional climate that teachers create (Flores & Sandoval Aldana, 2021; McCormick et al., 2021).

Despite global growth in teacher EI research, predictive studies linking emotional intelligence to both engagement and behavioral outcomes remain limited, especially within secondary-school contexts (Wang & Qin, 2025). There is also a need to determine whether emotional intelligence influences student behavior directly or indirectly through increased engagement (Huang & Li, 2024). Therefore, this study investigates teacher emotional intelligence as a predictor of classroom engagement and behavioral adjustment, contributing empirical evidence to the discourse on emotional competencies in teaching.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Emotional Intelligence and Classroom Climate

The classroom climate refers to the emotional and social atmosphere of the instructional setting, characterized by warmth, trust, respect, and a sense of belonging (Reyes et al., 2012). Researchers consistently observe that emotionally intelligent teachers are central to the creation of positive classroom climates. Brackett et al. (2023) found that teachers who demonstrate empathy, acknowledge student emotions, and practice calm communication contribute to emotionally safe environments where students are more motivated to participate. Conversely, low emotional intelligence among teachers may result in reactive or impulsive responses to behavioral disruptions, which can escalate conflict and create anxiety among students (McCormick et al., 2021). Recent work by Lin et al. (2024) concludes that a supportive climate is critical not only to academic outcomes, but also to emotional belonging and social adjustment. Classroom climate therefore emerges as a mediating factor through which teacher emotional intelligence influences student experience.

Classroom Engagement and its Relationship to Teacher EI

Classroom engagement encompasses behavioral participation, emotional enthusiasm, and cognitive involvement in academic tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004). Engagement is widely recognized as a predictor of academic performance, attendance, and social behavior (Bryce et al., 2023). Flores and Sandoval Aldana (2021) report that students feel more engaged when they perceive their teachers as emotionally supportive and invested in their progress. Huang and Li (2024) expand this view by suggesting that teacher emotional intelligence plays a direct role in emotional contagion, wherein teachers' emotional expressions shape student emotional states and levels of enthusiasm. Emotional validation, encouragement, and perceived care have been found to enhance students' willingness to participate, concentrate, and persist in tasks. Thus, teacher emotional intelligence is positioned as a crucial agent of student engagement.

Student Behavioral Adjustment and Classroom Dynamics

Student behavioral adjustment refers to cooperation, adherence to classroom norms, emotional regulation, and the reduction of disruptive behaviors (Brackett et al., 2023). Behavioral concerns have increased in secondary schools following pandemic-related academic disruptions, with heightened reports of aggression, avoidance behaviors, and emotional withdrawal (Roy et al., 2023). Teacher emotional intelligence becomes

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particularly relevant in this context. McCormick et al. (2021) demonstrate that when teachers adopt restorative, empathetic communication strategies, student behavioral issues decline significantly. Hashmi et al. (2022) further observe that emotionally intelligent teachers approach misbehavior as an opportunity for guidance rather than punishment, helping students internalize self-regulation and accountability. Behavioral adjustment is thus not viewed solely as a student attribute, but as a condition shaped by teacher behavior, instructional emotional tone, and the socio-emotional norms modeled by adults.

Interrelationships among Teacher EI, Engagement, and Behavior

A synthesis of the literature suggests a complex triadic relationship among emotional intelligence, engagement, and behavioral adjustment. Ability-based emotional intelligence theory explains that accurate emotional perception and adaptive emotional use enable teachers to prevent emotional escalation in instructional situations (Matthews et al., 2023). Affective Events Theory reinforces that emotional experiences during classroom interactions influence student performance and participation (Wang et al., 2024). Social learning perspectives further assert that students adopt behavioral and emotional patterns through observation, suggesting that emotionally intelligent teachers indirectly shape student behavior (McCormick et al., 2021). Although the literature strongly argues for this interconnectedness, empirical research statistically validating the model of teacher emotional intelligence predicting engagement and behavioral outcomes remains limited, particularly within Indian school contexts. Wang and Qin (2025) call for more predictive studies that incorporate multiple respondent data to explain how teacher-based competencies influence classroom functioning.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite the expanding discourse on emotional intelligence in education, most scholarly work focuses on teacher well-being, stress, or leadership capacity rather than student-centered outcomes. Few studies examine emotional intelligence through predictive or mediational models that link it explicitly to classroom engagement and behavioral adjustment. Research conducted within Indian schooling systems often neglects emotional competencies and seldom incorporates triangulated data from both teachers and students. This lack of empirical evidence underscores the need for the present study, which investigates not only whether teacher emotional intelligence predicts classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment, but also whether engagement serves as a mediating variable in this relationship.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of teacher emotional intelligence, classroom engagement, and student behavioral adjustment in secondary schools.
2. To examine the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and classroom engagement.
3. To examine the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and student behavioral adjustment.
4. To determine the extent to which teacher emotional intelligence predicts classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment.
5. To test whether classroom engagement mediates the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and student behavioral adjustment.

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HYPOTHESES

- H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and classroom engagement.
- H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and student behavioral adjustment.
- H₃: Teacher emotional intelligence significantly predicts classroom engagement after controlling for selected background variables.
- H₄: Teacher emotional intelligence significantly predicts student behavioral adjustment after controlling for selected background variables.
- H₅: Classroom engagement mediates the relationship between teacher emotional intelligence and student behavioral adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A survey research design was adopted to examine whether teacher emotional intelligence predicts classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment and to test engagement as a mediating variable (Creswell & Guetterman, 2021).

Population and Sample

The population consisted of secondary school teachers and students from Salem district, Tamil Nadu. A multistage sampling procedure identified 20 schools (10 government, 10 private). From each school, 15 teachers were randomly selected, totalling 300 teachers. Three students per teacher were selected to provide engagement ratings, producing a student sample of 900.

Variables

Teacher emotional intelligence served as the independent variable. Classroom engagement functioned as the mediating variable, and student behavioral adjustment acted as the dependent variable. Teacher experience, school type, and class size were treated as control variables.

Tools Used

Teacher emotional intelligence was measured using a standardized 40-item emotional intelligence inventory. Classroom engagement was assessed through a 20-item student rating scale, aggregated at the classroom level. Student behavioral adjustment was measured through a 15-item teacher-rating scale. Pilot testing produced Cronbach's alpha values between .84 and .87.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ethical approval and institutional consent were obtained. Teacher EI data were collected first, followed by student engagement reports and teacher behavioral ratings. Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were computed. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to determine predictive power, and mediation was tested using the Baron and Kenny approach with bootstrapped significance (Hayes, 2022).

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RESULTS

This section presents descriptive findings, correlation outcomes, and predictive regression models assessing the relationship among teacher emotional intelligence, classroom engagement, and student behavioral adjustment.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the overall level of teacher emotional intelligence, classroom engagement, and student behavioral adjustment. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for all major variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables
(N = 300 teachers / 900 students)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Teacher Emotional Intelligence	3.72	0.46
Classroom Engagement	3.45	0.52
Student Behavioral Adjustment	3.68	0.49

The results indicate that teachers reported a moderately high level of emotional intelligence, while student ratings reflected moderate classroom engagement and behavioral adjustment.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine associations among the variables. Teacher emotional intelligence demonstrated a strong positive relationship with classroom engagement ($r = .54, p < .001$) and a moderate positive association with student behavioral adjustment ($r = .47, p < .001$). Classroom engagement also showed a strong positive association with student behavioral adjustment ($r = .59, p < .001$).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of EI, Engagement and Behavioral Adjustment

Variable	1	2	3
1. Teacher Emotional Intelligence	1	.54***	.47***
2. Classroom Engagement	.54***	1	.59***
3. Student Behavioral Adjustment	.47***	.59***	1

*** $p < .001$

These findings support the hypotheses that emotional intelligence is positively linked to engagement and behavior.

Regression Analysis

A hierarchical regression model was used to assess predictive strength. In Step 1, teacher experience, school type, and class size accounted for 6 percent of the variance in student behavioral adjustment ($R^2 = .06, p < .05$). In Step 2, teacher emotional intelligence was added and significantly increased explained variance to 26 percent ($\Delta R^2 = .20, p < .001$).

Table 3: Regression Model Predicting Behavioral Adjustment

Predictor	β	t	Sig.
Step 1 (Controls)			
Teacher Experience	.09	2.15	.03
School Type	.06	1.88	.06

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Class Size	-.12	-2.42	.02
Step 2 (Added Variable)			
Teacher Emotional Intelligence	.45	9.67	.001***
Final Model Statistics	R ² = .26	ΔR ² = .20	F(4,295)= 25.38***

*** $p < .001$

The significant coefficient for emotional intelligence ($\beta = .45$) indicates that teachers high in emotional intelligence are more likely to manage student behavior successfully.

Mediation Test: Role of Classroom Engagement

To test whether engagement mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and behavioral adjustment, regression estimates were examined sequentially. Emotional intelligence significantly predicted engagement ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). When engagement was added as a mediator, the direct effect of emotional intelligence on behavior declined from $\beta = .45$ to $\beta = .23$ ($p < .01$), indicating partial mediation. This suggests that emotionally intelligent teachers indirectly foster positive behavioral adjustment by first increasing student engagement.

DISCUSSION

The study set out to determine whether teacher emotional intelligence predicts classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment, and whether engagement mediates this relationship. The findings confirm that teacher emotional intelligence plays a critical role in shaping classroom processes. Teachers with higher emotional intelligence were found to foster greater student engagement, which supports earlier work emphasizing that emotionally supportive teaching encourages participation and attention (Rahman et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). This relationship also aligns with Flores and Sandoval Aldana (2021), who observed that student interest increases when teachers demonstrate empathy and emotional responsiveness.

The results further show that emotional intelligence predicts student behavioral adjustment. This outcome is consistent with studies indicating that emotionally intelligent teachers employ calmer, more constructive approaches to misbehavior, reducing disruptions and encouraging cooperation (Hashmi et al., 2022; Brackett et al., 2023). The present findings extend these assertions by providing predictive evidence within an Indian secondary school context.

Engagement was found to partially mediate the link between emotional intelligence and behavior. This suggests that emotionally intelligent teachers strengthen behavior partly by increasing participation and task involvement. When students are actively engaged, opportunities for disruptive behavior naturally decrease. Similar pathways have been noted by Huang and Li (2024), who highlight engagement as a mechanism that connects teacher socio-emotional competence with student outcomes.

Overall, the results contribute to theory by demonstrating that emotional intelligence is not merely a personal trait but a teaching competency with measurable classroom effects. The findings underscore the importance of embedding emotional-competence training in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development.

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Emotional intelligence should be treated as a professional competency essential for effective instruction.
- Pre-service teacher programs should incorporate modules on self-awareness, emotion regulation, empathy, and communication.
- Emotionally intelligent teachers are better able to manage behavior, reduce conflict, and motivate learners.
- Classroom management practices should shift from discipline-focused control to emotionally responsive strategies.
- Teacher appraisal and mentoring systems can include emotional-competence indicators.
- School culture should promote emotional support, collaboration, and reflective practice among staff.
- Emotional intelligence should be recognized in national teacher-training standards.
- Policymakers may encourage EI-based professional development as part of continuous teacher upskilling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Integrate structured emotional-intelligence training within teacher education curriculum.
- Conduct regular in-service workshops on conflict resolution, positive discipline, and socio-emotional classroom management.
- Establish mentoring programs pairing emotionally competent teachers with novice teachers.
- Implement schoolwide social-emotional learning programs to support student self-regulation.
- Future research should test intervention-based EI programs and examine their long-term effects on academic and behavioral outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the predictive role of teacher emotional intelligence on classroom engagement and student behavioral adjustment in secondary schools. The findings demonstrated that emotionally intelligent teachers are more effective in fostering engaged classroom environments and reducing behavioral challenges. Classroom engagement was found to partially mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and behavior, suggesting that emotional competence influences student conduct both directly and indirectly through active participation.

The results affirm that emotional intelligence is not merely a personal disposition but a measurable teaching competency that contributes to classroom order, learning motivation, and socio-emotional development. By integrating emotional-competence training into teacher education and school practices, educational systems can enhance both instructional quality and student outcomes. Continued research and policy attention are needed to ensure emotional intelligence becomes a foundational element of teacher preparation and school improvement.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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