

The Correlation between English Emotional Intelligence and Work Engagement of Secondary School Teachers in China

Hongmei Li, Yige Cheng

Guizhou Qiannan College of Science and Technology, Qiannan, Guizhou, 550600, China

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Abstract: Emotional intelligence is distinguished as a key factor that influences work engagement. However, there is limited research exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement among secondary school English teachers in China's ethnic regions. Therefore, this study utilizes self-determination theory to support how emotional intelligence affects work engagement in such educational contexts. This study used purposive sampling to survey 301 secondary school English teachers from different ethnic regions in China. SPSS 27.0 was used for correlation analysis. The results of the study showed that (1) English teachers have higher levels of emotional intelligence and work engagement, reflecting the overall high psychological quality of the participants. (2) There is a positive correlation between the variables, showing their positive relationship. Ultimately, this study provides pedagogical insights for educational policy makers and practitioners to guide the improvement of teacher training and support systems so that they can work together to promote educational quality and equity in ethnically diverse regions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Due to the demanding nature of the teaching profession, teachers are particularly vulnerable to emotional stress and mental health issues. With the increasing global emphasis on quality education, teachers not only have to cope with heavy workloads but also navigate complex classroom dynamics. These challenges affect not only their pedagogical performance but also their engagement in their work. In this context, improving teachers' work engagement has become a focus of contemporary educational research. The significance of emotional intelligence in the field of education has been well documented and its impact on teachers' work engagement has been a focus of contemporary research. The role of emotional intelligence in creating favorable learning environments and improving teachers' professional performance cannot be underestimated^[1-4].

Emotional intelligence is a multidimensional concept that includes the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, which is critical in the complex social dynamics of educational settings and the profession of teaching, which is fraught with the risk of psychological distress ,

work engagement has been shown to predict basic outcomes such as teachers' sense of efficacy, satisfaction, and overall well-being. Teachers with high levels of engagement are more likely to devote their energies to work-related goals, resulting in better performance compared to their less engaged counterparts. However, there has been limited exploration of the relationship between emotional intelligence and work engagement in relation to the unique contexts of secondary school English teachers in different ethnic regions of China.

The current study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how emotional intelligence can potentially increase teachers' work engagement in different ethnic regions of China. This research is set against the backdrop of the growing recognition that emotional intelligence is not only beneficial but also crucial for teachers' professional and personal well-being (Méndez-López et al., 2019; Vesely-Maillefer & Saklofske, 2018). Essentially, this paper emphasizes the critical role of emotional intelligence in influencing work engagement, and by integrating perspectives from the emotional intelligence and work engagement literature, this study aims to shed light on the subtle relationship between these two constructs and provide insights for educational policies and teacher development programs in China's diverse ethnic regions^[5].

1.2 Core Concepts

Emotional intelligence, formally defined by Mayer and Salovey, includes the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions, which is critical to the work and professional development of educators. Emotional intelligence is a key factor in reducing distress and negative emotions while promoting positive emotions and strong social support, thus in turn improving their overall personal performance. The importance of emotional intelligence in educational settings cannot be overemphasized as it directly contributes to creating a positive and engaging learning environment^[6-9].

This positive emotional state is inextricably linked to the concept of work engagement, which refers to a mindset of being fulfilled and fully engaged in one's work and is reflected in an educator's vitality, dedication, and absorptive capacity (Schaufeli et al., 1989). Highly engaged educators are adept at utilizing a variety of pedagogical methods and resources to skillfully respond to students' varying learning styles and preferences. This diversity of teaching methods is complemented by an environment filled with motivation, which is essential to stimulate student engagement and promote academic success and supported by Perera, H. N. et al. (2018), such environments not only enhance the educational experience, but also emphasize the importance of fostering a nurturing educational climate for students' academic and emotional prosperity^[10-11].

In conclusion, educators' emotional intelligence deeply influences work engagement, which promotes positive learning environments, supports teachers' well-being, and advances their professional development, which provides a theoretical aspect for understanding the dynamic interplay between educators' emotional intelligence and their work engagement, particularly professional efficacy.

1.3 Literature Review

Resource Enhancement Theory suggests that people with high emotional intelligence are more likely to overcome obstacles at work and invest more energy. Success and recognition at work boost their emotional intelligence, strengthen their commitment to their work, and increase their competence, creating a positive cycle of resource growth. The relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher engagement is a compelling area of research in educational psychology with the potential to significantly improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement. There is evidence that emotional intelligence has been consistently linked to increased teacher engagement ,

influencing teacher engagement and effectiveness in the classroom^[12-13]. Selvi and Aiswarya (2023) conducted an in-depth study on the relationship between the emotional intelligence of automotive industry employees and work engagement relationship between them and found that emotional intelligence has a significant impact on employee commitment and performance^[14].

Sawitri found that there is a strong positive correlation between emotional intelligence and work engagement, particularly for teachers in special needs schools. Bartlett outlined the nature of this relationship by emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in complex classrooms and effectively managing emotional responses, which is a key to maintaining teachers' professional engagement. Such perspective reinforces the notion that teachers are better equipped to create positive learning environments with high emotional intelligence, thereby improving their own engagement and the quality of their work^[15].

Therefore, emotional intelligence is a personal resource in fostering a positive psychological state at work, which can enhance employee engagement and strongly link to teacher work engagement, enhancing job satisfaction and students' outcomes. As the positive impact of emotional intelligence is well-documented, it can improve learning and work performance through enhanced stress management and communication. However, there are limitations of the study, such as lack of research on Chinese teachers, insufficient sample size, and lack of representativeness for a certain group like the ethnic groups of China^[16].

1.4 Hypothesis

Based on the literature review, there are few studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence, work engagement and specific English subjects in different ethnic regions of China. This study aims to fill this important research gap by investigating the relationship between these two variables among secondary school English teachers. The rationale for focusing the study on ethnic areas is multifaceted: it can capture the cultural diversity that may influence these psychological constructs, addressing the unique challenges faced by educators in these areas, ensuring a more representative sample of Chinese educators, and providing valuable insights into educational policy making. Based on the above mention situation and supported by empirical insights gained from the literature review, this study put forward a testable hypotheses based on the findings as following. There is a significant positive correlation between the emotional intelligence and work engagement of English teachers in ethnic areas of China^[17].

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Between June and July 2024, the author conducted a comprehensive survey of 321 English language educators from secondary schools in ethnic minority areas of China. This targeted sample was designed to capture a wide range of perspectives within this particular educational context. A rigorous validation process, including the exclusion of any responses that did not meet the established data completeness criteria, resulted in a dataset of 301 valid questionnaires, and the response rate is 94%. In terms of gender distribution of educators, there were 36 males or 12%, while there were significantly more females with 265 or 88% of the total. This well-developed dataset provides a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and ensures the reliability and generalizability of the findings^[18].

2.2 Instruments and Measures

2.2.1 Emotional Intelligence Scale

The scale was designed by Chi-Sum Wong and Kenneth S. Law (2002) and consists of 16 succinct statements to evaluate four core aspects of emotional intelligence: appraisal of one's own emotions (4 items, including items such as "I have a good understanding of my own emotions"), appraisal of the emotions of others (4 items, including items such as "I have a good understanding of my own emotions"), appraisal of others' emotions evaluation (4 items, including items such as "I am good at observing the emotions of others"), use of emotions (4 items, including items such as "I always tell myself that I am a competent person"), and regulation of emotions (4 items, including items such as "I am very competent at controlling my own emotions"). Respondents are prompted to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert scale, a widely recognized psychometric tool that provides a nuanced range of agreement. The Cronbach's alpha value for the teachers' emotional intelligence in this study was 0.84, indicating high reliability. The endpoints of the scale were categorized as 1 and 7, with 1 representing "completely disagree" and 7 representing "completely agree".

2.2.2 Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) was designed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), which includes three dimensions. Vigor (3 items; to give a simple example, e.g., "When I get up in the morning, I want to go to work"), Dedication (3 items; e.g., "I am passionate about my work"), and Absorption (3 items; to give an example. "I feel happy when I work intensely"). These dimensions are very important for understanding the depth of an individual's engagement in the class or out of the class. The internal consistency coefficient of this scale is 0.85, indicating a high reliability. The scale utilizes a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored by descriptors that ranges from "never" to "always," thus providing a comprehensive picture of frequency of engagement. The scoring was designed to range from 0 to 6, allowing for a fine-grained quantification of the level of participation reported by respondents^[19].

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As for this study, questionnaires were distributed with the help of head of English department and regional researchers by using the Wenjuanxing (<https://www.wjx.cn>) website of China. Data were imported into the SPSS 27.0 statistical analysis software for processing, employing descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson correlation analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was primarily utilized to calculate the mean and variance of each variable. Pearson correlation analysis was mainly employed to examine the relationships between the variables.

2.4 The Overall Situation and Correlation among the Variables

Table 1 Mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of the two variables
(n=301)

Variables	M + SD	EI	WE
EI	5.596 + 1.01	1	
WE	5.356 + 0.80	.742**	1

EI=Emotional Intelligence; WE=Work Engagement; ** means significant correlation at the 0.01

level (two-tailed), $P < 0.00$.

Upon integrating the provided content with the analysis of Table 1, it is evident that the average scores for all variables: Emotional Intelligence ($M=5.596$). Work Engagement ($M=5.356$), specifically, emotional intelligence and work engagement exceed the mid-point of 4 and 3, respectively, all of which are above their respective mid-points, indicating a high level of these attributes among the participants^[20].

In addition, the correlation between emotional intelligence and work engagement was 0.742^{**} , indicating that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with higher levels of work engagement. The results of the study emphasize the interrelatedness of these concepts and suggest that together they contribute to a greater sense of work engagement.

Combined with the correlation analysis, there is a positively correlation between the two variables, which are not only significantly higher than the midpoint, but are also closely related to each other. This integrated perspective suggests that there is a high level of emotional intelligence and work engagement in the study sample and that there is a strong positive correlation. The above findings prove the hypotheses proposed in this study. (Hypothesis: There is a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and work engagement of teachers in ethnic areas of China).

The current study elaborates on the relationships between the above mentioned variables among a sample of teachers, The results reveal significant positive correlation among the variables, with emotional intelligence emerging as a foundational predictor of work engagement. This section will discuss these findings in the context of recent literature^[21].

Based on the Hypothesis, the coefficients between EI and WE ($.742^{**}$) indicates the strong positive correlation between the two variables. In discussing the impact of emotional intelligence on work engagement (WE), the findings of this study align with previous research, confirming the positive role of emotional intelligence in predicting work engagement, the results demonstrate a significant positive correlation between teachers' emotional intelligence and their work engagement. That's to say, the higher the emotional intelligence of teachers, the greater their level of work engagement, indicating that emotional intelligence is a key factor in enhancing teachers' passion and involvement in their profession in ethnic regions of China^[22].

3. Findings and Implications

The present study contributes to the burgeoning field of Positive Psychology by examining the interrelationship among EI and WE within a cohort of 301 secondary-school English teachers in ethnic areas of China. The findings underscore the pivotal role of EI in the workplace, particularly in the context of English language teaching, the findings can be summarized in two main points:

On the one hand, this study revealed that English teachers rank high level in emotional intelligence, work engagement, which suggests that these educators are generally successful in having a positive psychological state that fosters engagement and emotional intelligence.

On the other hand, this study found that there were a significant positive correlations between the emotional intelligence and work engagement. This correlation suggests that higher emotional intelligence is associated with higher work engagement. The consistency of these relationships suggests that emotional intelligence may be a foundational attribute that enhances other positive psychological outcomes.

The above mentioned findings support the importance of fostering emotional intelligence in educational settings as it can greatly influence teachers' work engagement. These findings also have practical implications for the professional development of English language teachers and provide a framework for schools and educational institutions to improve teacher engagement. By enriching

the discourse of positive psychology, this study provides insights that can be used to improve the psychological and professional environments of English teachers, thereby contributing to the overall quality of secondary English education in China and other countries^[23].

4. Conclusions

This study examined the correlation between emotional intelligence and work engagement among secondary school teachers in ethnic areas of China. The study confirmed a positive correlation predicted in the hypothesis, emphasizing the strong positive correlation that exists between the two variables. This study also provides educational insights and advocates targeted interventions utilizing emotional competence to improve teaching effectiveness and make English language teaching sustainable in ethnic areas. Despite the strengths of this study, there are limitations. The medium-sized sample may limit the generalizability of the findings. The level of emotional intelligence reported by the participants suggests that there is a need to further explore the factors that influence emotional intelligence in this population.

Indeed, based on the results of this study, there are clear directions for future research. More experimental studies are needed to track the evolution of these psychological constructs and their impact on work engagement. In addition, research could be extended to a more diverse group of educators to gain a broader understanding of the internal mechanisms at work and the dynamics involved. Finally, further research on other mediators could uncover more sophisticated models explaining how emotional intelligence affects work engagement in educational contexts or other dependent variables. These future research directions have the potential to enhance the impact and applicability of this study in the field of educational psychology.

Author Contributions

Author Hongmei Li was responsible for the initial conceptualization and drafting of the manuscript. Who also integrated the feedback received from Author Yige Cheng into the final version of the manuscript. Author Yige Cheng provided critical feedback on the manuscript at various stages of its development and assisted with the revision process.

Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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