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Supporting Educators for Higher Student Success: Addressing the Critical Need for Emotional
Intelligence Training in the Costa Rican English Education

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Supporting Educators for Higher Student Success: Addressing the Critical Need for Emotional Intelligence Training in the Costa Rican English Education

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence has become an indispensable aspect of teachers' self-development in the 21st century, essential for regulating their emotions and positively influencing those around them. In the education field, there has been a noticeable increase in feelings of dissatisfaction, depression, burnout, anxiety, and high levels of stress among educators. This trend highlights the urgent need for effective emotional management strategies. Therefore, this essay aims to encourage educational institutions, organizations, and individuals to actively support teachers' mental health. By fostering an environment that prioritizes emotional well-being, the quality of the teaching-learning experience for both teachers and students can significantly improve. This approach not only enhances educators' overall well-being but also creates a more conducive learning environment, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes

Keywords: burnout, education, emotional intelligence, mental health, training.

Resumen

La inteligencia emocional se ha convertido en un aspecto indispensable del autodesarrollo de los profesores del siglo XXI, esencial para regular sus emociones e influir positivamente en quienes les rodean. En el ámbito educativo, se ha producido un notable aumento de los sentimientos de insatisfacción, depresión, agotamiento, ansiedad y altos niveles de estrés entre los educadores. Esta tendencia requiere de estrategias eficaces de gestión emocional. Por lo tanto, este ensayo pretende impulsar a las instituciones educativas, las organizaciones y los individuos a apoyar activamente la salud mental de los profesores. Al fomentar un entorno que dé prioridad al bienestar emocional, la calidad de la experiencia de enseñanza-aprendizaje tanto para los profesores como para los alumnos puede mejorar significativamente. Este enfoque no sólo mejora el bienestar general de los educadores, sino que también crea un entorno de aprendizaje más propicio, lo que en última instancia conduce a mejores resultados educativos.

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Palabras clave: agotamiento, capacitación, educación, inteligencia emocional, salud mental.

Introduction

The educational setting is a dynamic and ever-evolving environment that adapts to people's needs and challenges. As a result, it is the responsibility of educators to adjust to new times, no matter how demanding it may be. In this new era, emotional intelligence (EI) training has emerged as a new challenge for educators. According to Morera et al. (2018), educators function as exemplars for students, offering them direction on principles that can shape their conduct and responses across different situations.

Emotional intelligence can have a profound impact on education, benefiting all individuals involved in the process. It is important to note that this transformation should not be solely the responsibility of teachers as they are just one piece of the puzzle. In fact, Pentón et al. (2023) emphasized that everyone within and outside of education should prioritize the well-being of teachers. As they are the primary bridge between students and their environment, teachers play a critical role in creating a positive and inclusive learning environment where both students and teachers can thrive and achieve their full potential. In this collaborative effort, teachers and all other participants work together to learn, grow, and advance in the regulation of emotions, thereby equipping themselves to effectively navigate all aspects of the teaching process.

In 2018, the *Ministerio de Educación* (MEP²) of Costa Rica launched a new approach called "Emotional Education for Teaching Staff: A Strategy for Ongoing Training" (Morera et al., 2018). This strategy aimed to reinforce the emotional training of teachers and encouraged them to reflect on their beliefs and teaching practices to identify their teaching needs. By implementing

² *Ministerio de Educación Pública* (MEP): the Ministry of Public Education is the entity in charge of the Costa Rican education system.

this approach, MEP hoped to create significant changes and better equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support the emotional development of their teachers and students.

Furthermore, educators bear a huge burden of duties inside and outside the classroom, such as designing lesson plans and completing administrative work. At the same time, teachers are going through a learning process as they navigate intricate interpersonal relationships with students, colleagues, administrators, and others (Pentón et al. 2023). The heavy weight of these professional and personal responsibilities, inadequate administrative support, and personal commitments frequently result in teacher burnout. For this reason, Rus et al. (2022) highlighted that in instances of teacher burnout, there is a tendency for reduced attention towards students and decreased empathy towards their circumstances. This attitude is unacceptable for student development as it discourages meaningful teacher-student relationships and impedes learning.

Investing in emotional intelligence training is increasingly essential for improving education quality and sustaining the teaching profession. Teachers face significant pressure, including student interactions and administrative tasks, leading to burnout and isolation. Proper emotional intelligence training may equip educators to regulate emotions and manage challenges effectively, enhancing their ability to implement teaching successfully. With this in mind, this essay seeks to highlight how important emotional intelligence is for the well-being of the teachers.

Costa Rican Education

In the context of the Costa Rican education system, the English language assumes a position of significant importance as one of the most demanding and essential subjects for both the government and its population. According to Brand and Arias (2022), "English teaching in Costa Rica dates back to the beginning of the 20th century as a response to the influence of

European and North American markets and their connections with the country's economic growth" (p. 194). For this reason, proficiency in English is increasingly imperative for accessing qualified employment opportunities; Salazar and Calderon (2023) stated that Costa Rica's appeal as a tourist destination leads to an increase in job opportunities for Costa Ricans and nurtures the development of soft skills, leading to a deeper comprehension of global communication. Therefore, mastering this language is crucial to compete in the job market.

In the economic sphere, Costa Rica has recognized the necessity of empowering its citizens to align with global standards essential for corporate functionality and success. As a matter of fact, Brand and Arias (2022) affirmed that "the new socioeconomic system demanded a more skilled workforce with technological knowledge, computational abilities, and English language skills" (p. 195). Over time, English proficiency has transitioned from being an optional subject to an indispensable asset for Costa Ricans. Additionally, Brand and Arias (2022) agreed that "today, knowing English in a developing country can be a powerful tool to integrate individuals into the global economic and work-related requirements" (p. 197). In the current highly competitive job market, individuals need to adapt and fulfill the requirements of a qualified candidate to elevate their opportunities and quality of life.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Describing and defining Emotional Intelligence (EI) can be a challenging task as it encompasses a wide range of situations and emotions. However, Zeidner and Matthews (2018) provided a clear definition of EI as "generic competence in perceiving, understanding, and regulation of emotions (both in one's self and in others)" (p. 2). In other words, EI involves recognizing people's emotions and understanding how they impact their lives. By gaining a deeper understanding of yourself, you can become a more effective communicator and build

stronger relationships with those around you. EI can make all the difference in both personal and professional life.

In the field of education, teachers play a crucial role and are expected to possess highly developed professional skills. They must constantly adapt and reinvent themselves to address emerging challenges and accommodate the evolving needs of their students. With this in mind, Mihaela et al. (2022) described that teaching has a direct relation with the human factor; teachers are required to learn how to manage their emotions effectively which in turn fosters positive perceptions among students and other stakeholders. Given that students are the driving force behind teaching, educators need to remain consistently mindful of their emotions and the influence of their surroundings.

Teachers' Emotional Intelligence

One of the most concerning aspects related to emotional intelligence and the teaching praxis is the lack of literature on its importance and how to approach it (Mamat & Ismail, 2021). The education system and researchers usually fail to observe teachers' emotions, knowing that educators have a direct impact on students' behavior and reactions throughout the learning process (Meirav & Adi, 2014). In general, prioritizing individuals' stability should be emphasized in all aspects of life.

Moreover, Kratt (2018) indicated that "teachers have reported feeling incompetent and ill-prepared to assume a more active role in school mental-health initiatives" (p. 25). In addition to their teaching responsibilities, they are also required to address the emotional and psychological needs of their students. This dual role places significant pressure on teachers as they must not only motivate and educate students but also provide support and understanding. Consequently, these questions arise: what if their responses are inadequate? What if well-intentioned remarks

are misinterpreted? What if students feel unsupported or unheard? The fear of unintentionally causing harm or not effectively addressing students' needs weighs heavily on teachers, making the task even more complex.

Undoubtedly, students are the core of education, yet teachers stand as indispensable pillars within this framework, serving as leaders who guide through personal and academic growth. Murray (2021) highlighted that teachers serve as role models, influencing students in various aspects of their lives, including promoting equality and contributing to global development. Indeed, educators bear a critical responsibility apart from transmitting academic knowledge; they must also teach vital values and ethics, nurturing harmonious coexistence within society.

Sadly, there has been an increase in the impact on the mental health of teachers. According to Jomud et al. (2021), "during the past two decades, teaching is becoming more challenging as a profession: more paperwork, more bureaucracy, and more unruly classes" (p. 48). Thereby, educators spend a significant amount of time and energy trying to finish their assignments on time, besides the teaching hours. Furthermore, teachers are constantly mentally drained due to the challenges of "teaching students who lack motivation, maintaining discipline in the classroom, confronting general time pressures" (Jomud et al., 2021, pp. 48-49). Notably, educators have to stay vigilant and take into consideration every detail inside and outside the classroom that could affect their energy and well-being.

With these emotions flourishing, the Burnout Syndrome (BS) becomes evident in teachers' daily lives. This syndrome manifests when teachers experience exhaustion across multiple dimensions of their lives, including emotional, mental, physical, professional, and personal aspects. A key contributing factor to this syndrome is the ongoing need for teachers to regulate not only their own emotions but also the emotions of others (Smetackova, 2017).

Smetackova (2017) observed in recent studies that many teachers in the field of education experience feelings of exhaustion due to inadequate support from management leaders, low pay, prejudice toward their profession, and feeling undervalued. These challenges, combined with a lack of appreciation from students, contribute to high levels of stress among teachers, which can decrease their motivation to perform well in their jobs. Additionally, when educators suffer from BS, it significantly impacts their performance. This can lead to a lack of engagement and minimal effort in delivering their classes (Puertas et al., 2019). This impact has led to low levels of energy, motivation, empathy, heightened feelings of loneliness, and stress, which ultimately affect their teaching performance.

Nowadays, educators are responsible for many tasks, including planning classes and materials as well as administrative duties. Teachers are overloaded with various elements, such as lack of motivation, stress, monitoring student well-being, and connecting with parents. Aside from their primary role as educators, teachers also have the added responsibility of effectively communicating with parents. Rus et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of face-to-face communication in the field of education. Teachers must handle their interactions with students and family members with care and expertise to create a supportive and conducive learning environment. At some point, all these elements can reach their limit, causing teachers to feel overwhelmed and stressed.

In the field of education, it is common for administrative staff and parents to rely solely on educators to take full responsibility for student learning, overlooking the importance of collaboration among all involved parties in the educational journey. This lack of teamwork puts a heavy burden on teachers, leading to increased workload and elevated stress levels as they attempt to make up for the lack of support. Educators require support from their colleagues, school leaders, and students' families to alleviate stress and reduce their workload. This support

will have a positive impact on teachers' well-being that has a direct connection with students' performance and success (Penton et al., 2023).

Importance of Emotional Intelligence for Teachers

Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in creating a positive and supportive learning environment both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers who possess high levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to build strong relationships with students, colleagues, and parents, which can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes (Meirav & Adi, 2014). When educators can adjust their communication style and adapt to the unique personalities of their students, they are better able to facilitate effective learning experiences. Additionally, teachers who are mindful of their words and actions can help to foster a sense of safety and respect in the classroom, which can lead to a more positive and productive learning environment for all students.

Teachers' Influence on Students' Performance

Human beings are social individuals who are influenced by others' cultures, lifestyles, likes, and personalities to build their own. With this in mind, the learning process is a space where teachers and students are influenced by each other, but most importantly, educators' behavior and teacher-student interaction have a great impact on students' development and performance (Stronge, 2018). Besides, the significant influence that teachers have over students' personalities, little data and research refer to the teacher's personality and its impact on students (Kim et al., 2019). Today more than ever educators must be positive role models for students to succeed in their learning journey.

What makes a good teacher for students? Determining the qualities that make a teacher effective for students is a rigorous task due to the diverse personalities, perspectives, realities, and needs of students. A teacher who is ideal for one student may not be suitable for another. Nevertheless, certain elements and skills are indispensable for improving teaching practices and fostering a strong connection with students. While there is no definitive answer, comprehending students' perspectives plays a crucial role in a teacher's self-assessment and professional development. According to Szűcs (2017), "if we, as teachers, understand our students' perspectives, we can use this information for our self-assessment and professional growth" (p. 141). When educators exhibit a sincere interest in and comprehension of students' behaviors and requirements, they can develop the capacity to engage and communicate with them effectively, thereby fostering a stimulating and dynamic learning atmosphere.

For instance, what qualities and attributes must an educator have to effectively instruct students? It is possible for educators to be perceived as being more effective the more competencies they possess. However, Stronge (2018) stated that the teacher is the central figure in the classroom; he claimed that "the focus is on the whole person who brings to the classroom unique beliefs, values, attitudes, aspirations, motivation, knowledge, and skills all in one...the teacher" (p. 3). In simple words, teachers are not considered good solely based on their individual skills. Instead, they are seen as effective teachers when they can blend their personal traits with their professional selves. This natural integration helps them connect with students more easily and fosters better communication among students and teachers (Khan et al., 2017).

Strategies, Approaches, and Methods to Integrate Emotional Intelligence in Teacher Training

The need for teachers to possess or acquire the abilities of emotional intelligence is crucial to creating a safe space for both teachers and students. For this reason, Meirav and Adi (2014) proposed the emotional intelligence teaching model that focused on teachers' self-reflection and empathy: "Teachers were encouraged to explore their own self-awareness, their interpersonal awareness and the steps that can help them translate this awareness into behavior changes as well as changes in their belief system and feeling states" (Meirav & Adi, 2014, p. 4). The study revealed an increase in teachers' understanding and recognition of their own emotions and those of others. They also highlighted the correlation between teachers' awareness of how actions affect their emotions and the ability to manage them effectively. Additionally, the researchers stressed the importance of ongoing emotional training due to the daily changes and demands impacting teachers' emotional well-being.

On the contrary, Chen and Guo (2020) took a different approach by exploring the link between the emotional intelligence of school principals and their ability to improve teachers' instructional leadership methods. When educators feel that their leaders are highly committed and actively involved in the teaching process, they feel supported and empowered. It is important to understand that a leader's responsibilities go beyond delegation and instruction; they involve a deeper engagement that educators need to address. These leaders must develop emotional intelligence to make decisions that positively affect both teachers and students. This comprehensive understanding enables leaders to empathize with the challenges faced by educators and students in the learning environment, allowing them to thoughtfully assess these situations and implement effective program changes (Chen & Guo, 2020).

It is imperative to put teachers at the center of the educational setting and focus on their EI training instead of solely placing students' emotional intelligence as a primary goal. Surprisingly, Dolev and Leshem (2017) emphasized that the teacher's role in the learning process is just as essential as the students. They argued that teachers should also be the

priority and have the freedom to develop their unique skills, including emotional intelligence, which can significantly improve student learning outcomes. This approach not only emphasizes the importance of teachers within the education system but also enhances motivation and encourages self-discovery, benefiting both their professional and personal lives. In other words, the authors pinpointed the crucial role of EI in teaching. They reinforced that, besides mastering language and content, teachers must also develop their EI to effectively regulate emotions and positively influence students' behavior, attitudes, motivation, and learning performance.

Dolev and Leshem (2016) investigated the implications of teacher-centered emotional intelligence training. Their findings revealed a progressive enhancement in educators' EI skills and responses as a result of the targeted training. Participating teachers concluded that active involvement in EI training precipitated a transformation in their pedagogical approaches, professional identity, and student interactions. The training allowed teachers to identify, comprehend, and address the emotional and attitudinal factors influencing their mental well-being, enabling them to reflect on and regulate these influences. The study underscored the imperative of prioritizing EI training for educators, emphasizing the necessity for thorough training owing to the additional temporal, intellectual, and emotional investment it demands compared to other professions in the realm of education.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence (EI) is considered a vital skill for an individual to have his or her emotions identified, controlled, and managed to become mentally and emotionally stable within oneself and among others. The present, globalized education system demands that educators take measures to enhance the emotional orientation and executive functioning of both students

and teachers, through EI training. Teachers find plenty of challenges and tough circumstances that can lead them to the edge, in the midst of this current social-cultural environment.

In the Costa Rican context, MEP must encourage and integrate the promotion and training of EI in teacher development programs. It is necessary to support teachers and students since they are vulnerable to many risks and low performance due to depression, anxiety, stress, and unhappiness. For this reason, MEP reinstated services to provide psychoeducation and self-care for teachers and administrative staff (Diaz, 2021). However, MEP should strive to include a wide range of resources, such as training sessions, conferences, workshops, and regular activities. This approach not only promotes the mental health of all staff members but also fosters a community that cares for its population.

It is indispensable to be aware that disregarding emotions and not letting them be processed often results in bottling up emotions, such as filling a jar until it reaches the top and spills over, which may affect teachers' performance and well-being and affect others as well. Therefore, EI promotion in education not only allows teachers to manage stressful situations and emotional breakdowns properly but also creates a supportive and caring environment for students to learn. Educators who are mindful and skilled in emotional literacy can better control their emotions and facilitate a supportive and empathetic learning environment for students.

While teachers are not therapists able to provide treatment, they do have an impactful role in the education of their students by hearing students' concerns, supporting students through their problems in the classroom such as bullying, demotivation, low attention, maturity and preparedness among others (Fitria, 2024). Essentially, teachers are figures of direction and assistance, akin to a parental role for pupils searching for advice, support, or help through tough times.

The incorporation of EI training in teachers' professional development aims to provide teachers as well as students the necessary tools to handle their emotions and situations objectively. In this way, they can cultivate an environment that welcomes and controls emotional output, mitigating emotional fatigue, depressive episodes, burnout and low performance, in both work and personal contexts. In summary, the challenges within the education world are vast, and ensuring the safety and wellness of teachers and students is key to providing the best possible experience for both parties.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Jessica Yolanda Cabrera Bustos, cédula de identidad 504340410, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de la responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado “**Supporting Educators for Higher Student Success: Addressing the Critical Need for Emotional Intelligence Training in the Costa Rican English Education**”, para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en Aprendizaje del inglés.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jessica C." with a small dot at the end.

Liberia, Guanacaste, a los 25 días del mes de agosto del año 2024.

Refrendo

Los abajo firmantes avalamos el Trabajo de Graduación de la estudiante Jessica Cabrera Bustos, cédula 504340410, que lleva como título **Supporting Educators for Higher Student Success: Addressing the Critical Need for Emotional Intelligence Training in the Costa Rican English Education**, dado que cumple con las disposiciones vigentes y la calidad académica requerida por el posgrado.

JUAN PABLO ZÚÑIGA VARGAS (FIRMA)
PERSONA FÍSICA, CFP-04-0102-0502
Fecha declarada: 01/10/2024 07:13:46 p. m.
Esta es una representación gráfica únicamente,
verifique la validez de la firma.

Juan Pablo Zúñiga Vargas
Profesor Tutor
Maestría en Educación

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