

## The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Work-Related Stress Among Iraqi EFL Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The current study aimed at examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress among the teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iraq. **Method:** The study adopted a quantitative correlational design, and the sample consisted of 56 middle and high school teachers in Iraq, selected according to a convenience sampling method. The questionnaire adopted was an online, structured questionnaire made up of two scales: An Emotional Intelligence scale and a Work-Related Stress scale, with 10 items on each scale using a 5-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for both instruments was used to confirm the instruments' reliability (EI = .711; Stress = .801). Spearman's rank correlation was used because the Shapiro-Wilk test revealed that the scores on emotional intelligence were normally distributed, but the scores on the work-related stress were not. **Results:** The findings showed a weak negative correlation that was not statistically significant between emotional intelligence and work-related stress ( $r = -.225$ ,  $p = .095$ ). The results indicate that there is a link between a rise in emotional intelligence and a decrease in stress level, but the relationship is not strong in this sample. **Novelty:** Based on the results of the study, further research on the influence of other factors affecting teachers' stress in educational environments is suggested.

## INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the most demanding professions, and teachers must assume a variety of duties concerning teaching, classroom management, assessment, and student interaction. These requirements may be heightened in contexts of EFL because students' language proficiency is uneven and they have limited opportunities to hear English outside the classroom. Consequently, Iraqi EFL teachers are subjected to a high level of stress with possible adverse effects on their teaching performance, psychological health, and professional satisfaction. The psychological aspects that might contribute to less or more stress in teachers are hence worthy of interest in education research.

In the present study, one of the most important psychological variables is known as emotional intelligence, which is regarded as an important personal and professional resource for teachers. Emotional Intelligence has been generally defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and regulate one's own and others' emotions [1]. Emotional intelligence, as defined by Goleman, is a collection of emotional skills that allows people to manage themselves and others in stressful scenarios, control their emotions, and develop positive relationships with others [2]. Researchers indicated that emotionally intelligent teachers had better emotional self-awareness, better emotional control in classroom situations, and were more responsive to students' needs.

The study revealed that emotional intelligence was found to be a significant factor for the ability of teachers in coping with stress. Anger, frustration, and anxiety are negative emotions that teachers with high EI could better control, thereby decreasing the level of stress in the workplace. By contrast, teachers with low EI were less equipped to deal with emotional situations; hence, they were prone to emotional stress and burnout. Similarly, previous research showed that emotional intelligence was negatively correlated with occupational stress, with the higher the level of emotional intelligence, the lower the level of occupational stress among teachers [3].

This relationship showed that emotional intelligence was a key independent variable that could explain stress in the educational context. Stress was considered in the present study as a psychological reaction to an environmental demand that was judged to be beyond one's coping resources and was therefore labeled as the dependent variable. In the teaching context, stress could arise from workload, time pressure, classroom management problems, emotional demands, and so on, depending on individuals' appraisal of the stressful situation and their coping ability [4]. Stress among teachers could cause them to feel less satisfied with their job, feel burned out, and be less effective at teaching.

In light of the above, the present study assumed that emotional intelligence was an important psychological resource that could predict stress among the Iraqi EFL Teachers. It was expected that teachers with higher emotional intelligence would be less stressed, while those with lower emotional intelligence would be more prone to occupational stress. Thus, the study was designed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress, and to find out if emotional intelligence can predict stress among Iraqi EFL teachers.

The present study is theoretically grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Lazarus and Folkman, which conceptualizes stress as a dynamic process resulting from the interaction between individuals and their environment [4]. Stress is influenced not only by external demands but also by how individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate those demands and the coping resources available to them. The model distinguishes between primary appraisal, which involves evaluating whether a situation is stressful, and secondary appraisal, which involves assessing available coping resources. Coping may involve problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies [4]. The study also draws on the Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by Mayer and Salovey, which conceptualizes emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions [1]. In the educational context, these abilities may help teachers manage classroom situations, maintain positive relationships with students, regulate negative emotions, and respond appropriately to professional pressures. Thus, emotional intelligence may function as an important psychological resource in managing occupational stress.

Previous studies have provided evidence of the relationship between emotional intelligence, stress, burnout, resilience, and teacher performance. Brackett et al. found that higher emotional intelligence was associated with better stress management and

classroom performance [5], while Jennings and Greenberg reported that teachers with stronger social-emotional competence experienced lower stress and established more positive learning environments [6]. Chan similarly found that emotional intelligence contributed to reducing teacher burnout and improving coping [7]. In EFL contexts, Vaezi and Fallah reported a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress and found that emotional intelligence was significantly predictive of stress [8]. Al Demerdash found that higher emotional regulation was associated with lower stress and anxiety among teachers [9], while Mousapour and Khorram identified a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and teaching styles, particularly stress management [10]. Other studies have linked teacher stress to workload, time pressure, student misbehavior, emotional exhaustion, and classroom management problems [11]–[13]. More recent research has further associated emotional intelligence with improved emotional regulation, lower burnout, greater resilience, motivation, mental health, and reduced stress among teachers [14]–[21]. Ghanei Motlagh et al. also showed that teachers' emotional and interpersonal characteristics, such as the use of humor, could positively influence EFL learners' classroom outcomes [22].

These findings indicate that emotional intelligence may play an important role in how teachers respond to occupational demands and manage stress. Vaezi and Fallah particularly demonstrated that higher emotional intelligence among EFL teachers was associated with lower stress [23], better classroom management, stronger teacher-student relationships, and greater adaptability to unexpected situations. Sharma and Chand further emphasized that sustained teacher stress can negatively affect mental health, job satisfaction, teaching skills, classroom discipline, feedback, and teacher-student relationships, while recommending emotional intelligence development and stress-management strategies as potential approaches to improving teacher well-being [24]. Nevertheless, although previous studies have examined emotional intelligence and stress in various educational and EFL contexts, relatively limited empirical attention has been given to Iraqi EFL teachers. Therefore, further investigation is needed to determine whether emotional intelligence is significantly related to stress among Iraqi EFL teachers.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Stress is known to be a very common psychological and occupational issue, making the lives of individuals emotionally imbalanced and, consequently, their work performance disoriented. Teachers in educational environments are subjected to various sources of stress, including workload, classroom management, students' behavior, time pressure, and demands of the institution. Under chronic, poorly managed stress, they impact a teacher's motivation, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in teaching [4].

Emotional Intelligence is noted as a crucial personal skill in comprehending, regulating, and managing one's own and others' emotions [1], [2]. Poorly developed EI skills are often seen in teachers who struggle with regulating their negative emotions, managing pressure in their work lives, and reacting poorly to upsetting situations in the classroom. Consequently, teachers with low EI tend to be more stressed in their work,

which in turn can adversely impact their psychological well-being and job functioning [3].

The problem of stress is more prominent in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iraqi schools because of high class sizes, insufficient resources, curriculum pressure, and the requirements of teaching a second language. Teachers often put themselves under emotional stress without adequate emotional support or coping mechanisms. Although emotional intelligence (EQ) is pertinent to stress management, few empirical studies focus on the predictive effect of emotional intelligence on stress among Iraqi EFL teachers. Thus, the issue of the present study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress levels among teachers in EFL in the Iraqi context, and the effect of this stress on the educational context. Knowing this connection is crucial to the improvement of a teacher's well-being, boosting performance in the classroom, and creating a more positive and effective learning environment.

### **Significance of Study**

The importance of the present study is because this study tried to contribute to solving an important psychological and educational problem that EFL teachers in Iraq are encountering, namely occupational stress. The teaching of English as a foreign language in Iraq carries several difficulties that include workload, pressure in the classroom, shortage of resources, and emotional difficulties. Often, these difficulties cause high levels of stress for teachers that impact their performance, motivation, and well-being. Hence, there is a need to explore factors that might help to decrease stress to improve the educational context.

The importance of this study is on the side of the researcher that found the emotional intelligence to be a predictive factor in dealing with stress among Iraqi teachers of English as a foreign language. The study helps to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among teachers, which is crucial to meet the emotional needs and coping mechanisms of teachers. Emotionally intelligent teachers are more likely to be able to cope with classroom pressures effectively, which may lead to better teaching, better decision-making, and better teacher-student relations.

In addition, the results of this study will have implications for the educational community, as educators, administrators, and policymakers will gain information from this study. Awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence can be a factor in the design of professional development programs that incorporate emotional skills training and positive coping strategies. These programs may help improve teachers' resilience, decrease job burnout, and boost job satisfaction, thereby improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Furthermore, this study has significance for Iraqi society as it has given emphasis to an issue that has been ignored in education studies most of the time; that is, the psychological issue. Reducing stress for teachers should help to create a more conducive and productive learning environment. A low-stress environment for teachers means better teaching, more involvement, and a better classroom dynamic for students.

Therefore, this study will make a contribution towards strengthening the well-being of teachers and the education process as a whole.

### Research Question

1. Is there a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and stress among Iraqi EFL teachers?

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Design

A quantitative correlational design was used in the present study to accomplish the objectives. This design was chosen for the following reasons: First, it enables the investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress without the need to alter factors. Second, this design will be used to investigate the correlation between emotional intelligence and work-related stress in Iraqi EFL teachers without focusing on any specific factor.

### Participants

The teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Iraq were the subjects of the present study. 56 participants were selected as the final sample. As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of a relatively equal number of males and females (29 males, 27 females). As for their teaching environment, most of the teachers ( $n = 31$ ) were working at middle schools, and the remaining teachers ( $n = 23$ ) were teaching at high schools. The non-probability convenience sampling technique was used in recruiting all participants as they were readily accessible and willingly gave consent to participate in the study.

**Table 1.** The demographic information of the participants

| No. | Gender                 | School Type                          |
|-----|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 56  | Male (29), Female (27) | Middle School (31), High School (23) |

### Instruments

In order to achieve the aims of the present study and to measure the variables which are the subject of the study in an objective manner, a quantitative self-report online questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. This questionnaire was given out electronically to make it more accessible and easier for the teachers to complete. The instrument was carefully designed into two main parts, with a standardized 5-point Likert scale to measure the participants' responses accurately.

### Procedures

For this study, the researcher gained permission from three experts in the English language teaching methodology field of the Department of English, Faculty of Education, to get the validity and clarity of the questionnaire. The researcher developed the questionnaire following the appropriate approvals. The questionnaire was adapted from two scales that were used in prior research: The Emotional Intelligence Scale in 1997 developed by Bar-On [3] and the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) developed by Fimian in 1984. It comprised 20 items, 10 asking about emotional intelligence and 10 asking about

work-related stress, with a five-point Likert scale. The researcher then translated the questionnaire into Arabic to aid the understanding of the participants. It was subsequently digitized to become an online form (Google Forms), which is easier to distribute and to collect responses. A questionnaire link was sent electronically to the Iraqi EFL teachers who work in intermediate and secondary schools. Male teachers from public and private schools, as well as female teachers from public and private schools, were included in the sample. It took 1 week for distribution. The participants were requested to answer all the questions in the questionnaire within a fixed time frame. The answers were obtained on an e-form. For the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was computed, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be in an acceptable range. Finally, the data collected were analyzed in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 26. To analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress of Iraqi EFL teachers, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used. The study used a correlational design in order to find out the relationship between the two variables.

#### **A. Emotional Intelligence Scale**

The first part of the questionnaire was specially developed to evaluate the independent variable of the study, which is Emotional Intelligence (EI) of teachers. This scale consists of 10 self-report statements in which participants must consider their emotional and social skills. The answers are entered on a standard 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always/True). The formulated items reflect aspects of emotional intelligence which are important in the educational context: emotional self-awareness, adapting to sudden change, dealing with conflict, and emotional regulation. Higher composite scores on this scale are reflective of the emotional intelligence of respondents.

#### **B. Work-Related Stress Scale**

In the second part of the questionnaire, a 10-item scale was used to quantify the occupational stress that the participants felt. Responses are measured in the same manner as the previous section, on a 5-point Likert scale. The items focus on typical pedagogical and psychological challenges experienced by teachers, such as classroom management issues, heavy workload, emotional stress, and demands on teacher performance. The total points of these items can be used as a good predictor of stress experienced by teachers within the workplace.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### *Results*

##### **Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)**

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed for both scales to determine the level of reliability and internal consistency of the various instruments. Table 2 shows that the 10 items of the Emotional Intelligence scale had a reliability coefficient of .711. The same reliability coefficient was observed with the Work-Related Stress scale (10 items). In the psychological and educational field, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .70 or greater is

considered acceptable. As both values obtained in the present study are above this determined value, the scales can be assumed to have a relatively good internal consistency and to be reliable instruments for the assessment of the intended variables.

**Table 2.** Reliability Statistics

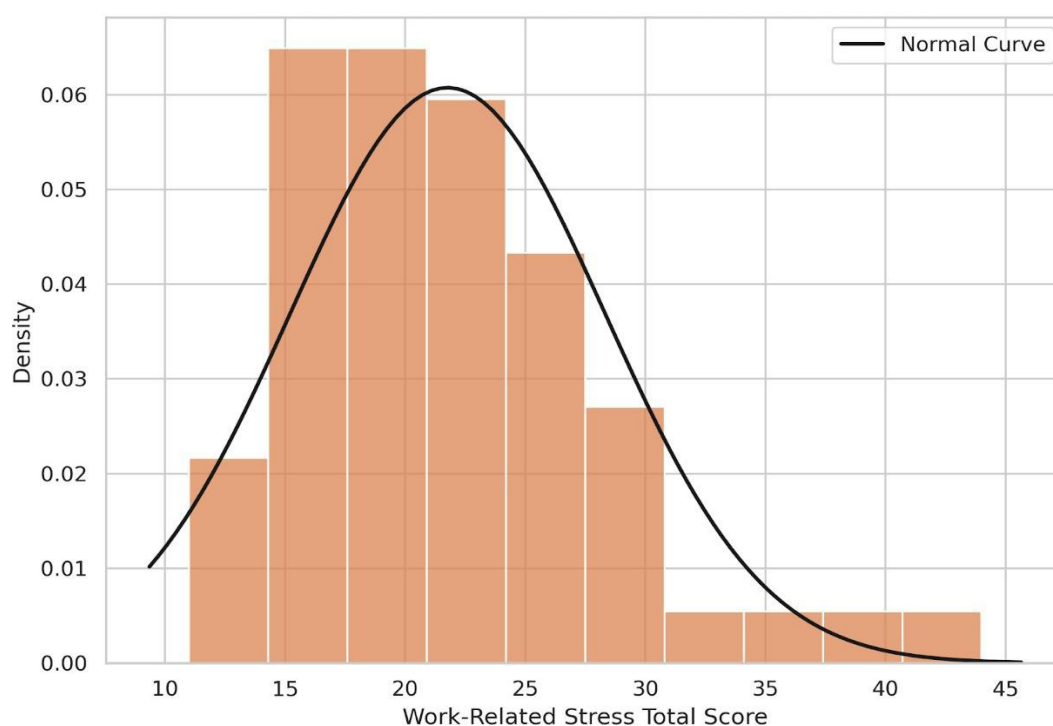
| Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha | Variable               |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 10              | .711.            | Emotional Intelligence |
| 10              | .801.            | Work-Related Stress    |

### Test of Normality

The normality assumption was tested for both variables with the Shapiro-Wilk test before performing the main inferential statistical test. This is very important for selecting the type of correlational analysis to use (parametric vs. non-parametric). As shown in Table 3 the findings indicated that the distribution of the scores of Emotional Intelligence was not significantly different from normal distribution ( $p = .704 > .05$ ). On the other hand, the Work-Related Stress scores were significantly different from the normal distribution ( $p = .005 < .05$ ). The result was that the normality assumption condition for the dependent variable was violated and a non-parametric statistical test (Spearman's rank correlation) was used for further analysis.

**Table 3.** Normality Tests (Shapiro-Wilk)

| Sig. (p-value) | df | Statistic | Variable               |
|----------------|----|-----------|------------------------|
| .704.          | 56 | .985.     | Emotional Intelligence |
| .005.          | 56 | .935.     | Work-Related Stress    |



**Figure 1.** Distribution of work-related stress scores

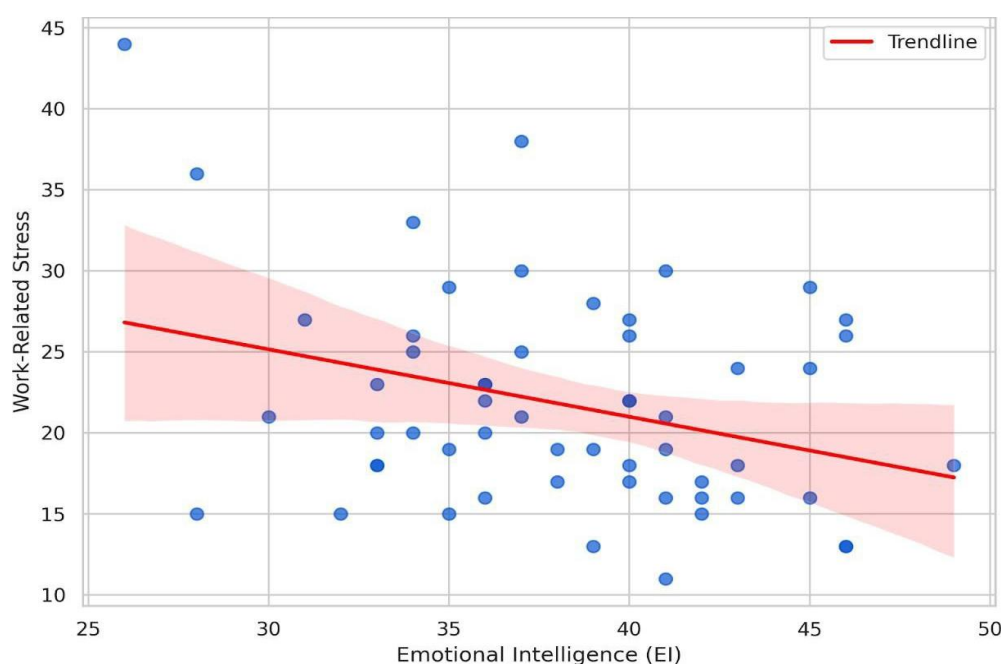
The histograms provided in Figure 1 visually justify the statistical choice for data analysis. While displays a bell-shaped curve indicating normality for EI, Figure 1 shows a skewed distribution for work stress. This visual evidence, supporting the Shapiro-Wilk results, confirms that a non-parametric approach is required to maintain the accuracy of the correlation results.

### Data Analysis and Correlation

The data obtained from the survey were analyzed using inferential statistical analysis in the form of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26) to answer the main research question and test the formulated hypothesis. The preliminary assumption of normality was violated w.r.t the dependent variable and hence a non-parametric statistic, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient (Spearman's rho), was used as a strong alternative to Pearson's correlation. The Spearman correlation analysis showed a low negative correlation between emotional intelligence and work-related stress ( $r_s = -.225$ ), as shown in Table 4. Moreover, this correlation was not statistically significant at the conventional  $\alpha$  level of 0.05 ( $p = 0.095$ ). The study does not reject the null hypothesis, therefore. The results of this investigation suggest that there is a weak inverse relationship between emotional intelligence and stress, as higher emotional intelligence loosely correlates with lower stress, but the statistical evidence is not strong enough to draw a definite conclusion.

**Table 4.** Correlations

| Work-Related Stress    |                 |       |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Emotional Intelligence | Spearman's rho  | -.225 |
|                        | Sig. (2-tailed) | .095  |
|                        | N               | 56    |



**Figure 2.** Scatter plot of EI vs. work-related stress

The scatter plot in Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the two variables. The downward-sloping trend line indicates a slight inverse relationship; however, the wide dispersion of data points reflects the weakness of this correlation. This visual data aligns with the p-value (.095), confirming that the observed trend is not statistically significant in this sample.

### **Discussion**

This research's results are partly consistent with the research results of the correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and occupational stress of teachers. The weak negative correlation that was found in this study ( $r = -0.225$ ,  $p = .095$ ) indicated a slight tendency for high EI scores to be related to low stress scores, although it was not statistically significant. This finding is consistent to some extent with Adams in 1999 and Al Demerdash, who emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence in improving emotion regulation of emotions and coping strategies [9]. Teachers who possess high EI have generally demonstrated a greater ability to deal with challenges and remain emotionally balanced under pressure in the classroom. But the current study's findings are not statistically significant in comparison with some earlier studies. This could be because the sample size was small ( $N = 56$ ) and because of the use of convenience sampling, which might have affected the strength of the relationship. Moreover, the findings revealed that external stress factors such as workload, student behaviour, and inadequate institutional support are still significant factors that cause stress for teachers. This is consistent with the findings of Scott and Hadjisymeou, Bano, and Jahedizadeh, who pointed to factors beyond emotional capabilities that affect occupational stress [11]–[13].

### **CONCLUSION**

**Fundamental Finding :** This study evaluated the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-related stress among Iraqi EFL teachers. The statistical analysis revealed a weak negative correlation that did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. **Implication :** The findings indicate that emotional intelligence, while helpful, is not the sole determinant of teacher stress levels. **Limitation :** The study is limited by the use of a relatively small and non-representative sample of Iraqi EFL teachers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader teacher populations and other educational settings. **Future Research :** Future research should explore larger representative samples and examine external organizational factors contributing to occupational stress in educational settings.

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