

## Teachers' Emotional Intelligence and Learners' Engagement

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### Abstract

Teachers' emotional competence shapes classroom dynamics in ways that extend well beyond lesson delivery. This study examined teachers' emotional intelligence alongside learners' engagement in one school district of a large division in Central Philippines during SY 2024–2025. Using a descriptive-correlational design, the researcher surveyed 135 teachers drawn through stratified random sampling from 206 teaching personnel. The survey instruments went through expert validation (rated 4.81, excellent) and reliability testing (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.955$ ). Frequency counts, means, the Mann–Whitney U test, and Spearman's rho were the main analytical tools. Teachers scored at a moderate level in emotional awareness ( $M = 3.31$ ), emotional management ( $M = 3.34$ ), social emotional awareness ( $M = 3.31$ ), and relationship management ( $M = 3.26$ ). Their students, however, were highly engaged in classroom learning ( $M = 4.32$ ), extracurricular activities ( $M = 4.06$ ), and community service ( $M = 4.03$ ). When teachers were grouped by age, older ones scored significantly higher across all four emotional intelligence domains. Most importantly, a moderate positive correlation emerged between teachers' emotional intelligence and learners' engagement ( $\rho = 0.475$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The message is clear: teachers who are more emotionally competent tend to have more engaged classrooms. These results point to the value of professional development programs that intentionally strengthen teachers' emotional skills as part of DepEd's K to 12 reform agenda.

**Keywords:** *Emotional intelligence, learner engagement, emotional awareness, descriptive-correlational research, K to 12 education*

### Bio-profile

**Michaelyn P. Gornez** teaches in a public school under the DepEd Division of Cebu Province. She is completing her Master of Arts in Education, Major in Administration and Supervision, at STI West Negros University in Bacolod City. Her research focuses on emotional intelligence among teachers, professional development pathways, and learner-centered instruction under the K to 12 frameworks. Outside academia, she draws on her daily classroom experience to ground her research in the practical realities of Philippine public education.





## Introduction

### Rationale

In Philippine public schools, teachers do far more than deliver lessons. They manage overcrowded rooms, mediate conflicts, and serve as emotional anchors for learners who come from varied and often difficult home situations. It is no surprise, then, that emotional intelligence—a teacher's capacity to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions—has attracted growing attention in educational research. DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, which introduced the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, explicitly values emotional support and professionalism as pillars of learner-centered instruction. Brackett et al. (2019) showed that when teachers handle emotions well, classroom climate improves and students participate more. Wang et al. (2021) made a similar point: teachers with high EI are better equipped to reach diverse learners, which matters greatly in a country where class sizes are large and resources are thin.

Emotional intelligence is usually broken down into four areas. Emotional awareness refers to how well a person recognizes what they are feeling and why. Emotional management is about keeping those feelings in check, especially under pressure. Social emotional awareness involves picking up on other people's emotions—reading the room, so to speak. Relationship management covers the ability to build trust, handle conflict, and maintain good working ties with others. On the student side, engagement goes beyond sitting quietly in class. It includes genuine participation in lessons, joining school clubs and organizations, and getting involved in community outreach. Research by Xu et al. (2023) and Zinsser et al. (2022) confirms what many educators already sense: teachers who are emotionally skillful tend to draw more participation from their students.

Yet for all the international evidence, relatively few studies have examined how teacher EI connects to student engagement in Central Philippine settings. That gap motivated this research. The goal was to produce findings that school leaders and program planners could actually use—findings grounded in the specific conditions of a district where tourism, farming, and fishing shape the local economy, and where most teachers hold bachelor's degrees and earn modest salaries.

### Literature Review

A broad body of literature supports the idea that teachers' emotional competencies shape what happens in the classroom. Valente and Lourenço (2020) found that teachers who regulate their own emotions well tend to run calmer, more disciplined classrooms and report higher job satisfaction. Kariou et al. (2021) went further, showing that emotional labor—the effort of suppressing or performing emotions that are not felt—leads to burnout when teachers lack regulation skills. On the relational side, Mérida-López and Extremera (2020) demonstrated that teachers who manage interpersonal dynamics skillfully create stronger rapport and sustain student attention over time. Jennings and Greenberg (2018) observed that newer teachers, in particular, struggle to form emotionally supportive bonds with students because they have not yet built the relational confidence that comes with experience.





Where learner engagement is concerned, the research paints a picture with multiple layers. Knifsend and Graham (2020) linked extracurricular involvement to stronger school belonging, while Ab Ghani et al. (2020) found that co-curricular participation develops leadership skills among young learners. Community service has its own benefits: Stukas et al. (2019) tied structured volunteering to greater civic responsibility, and Asio and Jimenez (2022) documented how Filipino students who volunteered during the pandemic developed stronger social awareness. In the local context, Vispo and Macalinao (2023) and Caparros (2023) reported high participation rates in school activities, but Benedicto and Andrade (2022) cautioned that strong compliance does not necessarily mean deep cognitive engagement—students in Philippine classrooms still lean heavily on rote approaches. A recurring finding across studies is that older, more seasoned teachers tend to score higher on emotional intelligence measures, a pattern Pretorius and Plaatjies (2023) and Aldrup et al. (2023) attributed to years of navigating the emotional demands of teaching.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

Four theories guided this study. Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence framework, built on earlier work by Salovey and Mayer, breaks EI into five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In a classroom, these translate into a teacher's ability to stay composed during a disruptive episode, read a struggling student's body language, or calm a tense parent-teacher conference. On the engagement side, Fredricks et al. (2004) offered a three-part model—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement—that captures whether students merely show up, whether they care about what they are doing, and whether they think hard about it. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory added an important motivational layer: people engage more deeply when they feel autonomous, competent, and connected to others. Finally, Astin's (1984) Student Involvement Theory reminded us that learning is proportional to the quantity and quality of a student's investment in school life, both academic and extracurricular. Taken together, these frameworks suggest that when teachers bring emotional skill into the classroom, they create the very conditions—safety, motivation, belonging—that drive students to engage.

## Objectives

The study set out to answer a straightforward but important set of questions. First, what did the teachers look like in terms of age, education, and income? Second, how emotionally intelligent were they across the four EI domains? Third, how engaged were their learners in classroom work, extracurriculars, and community service? Fourth, did emotional intelligence and engagement levels differ when teachers were grouped by their profile variables? And fifth—the central question—was there a significant relationship between how emotionally intelligent the teachers were and how engaged their students turned out to be?



## Methodology

### Research Design

A descriptive-correlational design was chosen because the study needed to do two things at once: paint a picture of current conditions and test whether two variables moved together. The descriptive piece captured where teachers stood on emotional intelligence and where learners stood on engagement. The correlational piece then asked whether the two were statistically linked (Manjunatha, 2019). No variables were manipulated; the researcher simply measured what was already there.

### Locale of the Study

Fieldwork took place in a school district within a large division in Central Philippines during SY 2024–2025. The district sits roughly 90 miles south of Cebu City in a third-class municipality whose economy runs on tourism, seasonal farming, and fishing. Over more than a century, the schools here have turned out professionals who work both locally and abroad, and they have collected a respectable list of division-level awards in academics, sports, and other competitions.

### Respondents of the Study

Out of 206 teachers spread across 15 schools, 135 were included in the sample. Cochran's formula set the target number, and stratified random sampling with a lottery draw ensured that each school was proportionally represented. The final pool broke down as follows: 66 teachers aged 39 or younger, 69 above 39; 82 holding only a bachelor's degree, 53 with graduate-level units or degrees; and 68 earning ₱29,000 or less per month, 67 earning more.

### Data Gathering Instrument

Two survey instruments did the heavy lifting. The first, with 40 items, measured teachers' emotional intelligence across four domains—emotional awareness, emotional management, social emotional awareness, and relationship management—10 items per domain. The second, a 21-item questionnaire, gauged learners' engagement in classroom activities, extracurricular programs, and community service. Both instruments used a five-point Likert scale ranging from Almost Never (1) to Always (5). A short section up front collected demographic details: age, highest educational attainment, and average family monthly income.

### Instrument Validity and Reliability

Three experts—an Assistant Schools Division Superintendent, a District Supervisor, and a School Principal, all with doctoral degrees—reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Their combined rating, computed using Good and Scates' criteria, came to 4.81 (excellent). For reliability, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 teachers in the same district



who were not part of the actual sample. Cronbach's Alpha returned a coefficient of 0.955, confirming excellent internal consistency (Bonett & Wright, 2019).

### Data Gathering Procedure and Ethics

Before anything else, the researcher secured clearance from the Public Schools District Supervisor. She then coordinated schedules with individual school heads and personally explained the study's purpose to each set of respondents before handing out the questionnaires. Participation was voluntary; every respondent signed an informed consent form and was assured that their identities would be protected through pseudonyms. Anyone could withdraw at any point without consequences. Once the questionnaires came back, the data were encoded and processed through SPSS.

### Statistical Tools

Means and frequency counts described the respondents' profiles and the levels of EI and engagement. Because each profile variable was split into two groups, the Mann-Whitney U test—appropriate for ordinal data with independent samples—was used to check for significant differences. Spearman's rho measured the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional intelligence and learner engagement. The interpretation scale ran from Very High (4.50–5.00) down to Very Low (1.00–1.49), with the same thresholds applied to both variables.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**

*Profile of the Respondents*

Variables	Categories	f	%
Age	Younger (39 and below)	66	48.90
	Older (above 39)	69	51.10
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower (bachelor's degree)	82	60.70
	Higher (MAED units and above)	53	39.30
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower (₱29,000 and below)	68	50.40
	Higher (above ₱29,000)	67	49.60

The teaching force in this district leans slightly older—69 out of 135 respondents (51.10%) were above 39. That is not unusual for a well-established district, and the practical implication is that much of the emotional maturity literature may apply here. What stands out more is the education gap: six out of ten teachers still hold only a bachelor's degree. Coupled with the fact that half earn ₱29,000 or less per month, the data suggest a workforce that could benefit from better access to graduate scholarships and salary upgrading—both of which bear on emotional well-being and professional confidence (Sutton et al., 2019; Frianeza et al., 2024).



**Table 2**

*Summary of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence*

Domain	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Emotional Awareness	3.31	Moderate Level
Emotional Management	3.34	Moderate Level
Social Emotional Awareness	3.31	Moderate Level
Relationship Management	3.26	Moderate Level

None of the four EI domains cracked the “high” threshold. Teachers scored moderately across the board—they are aware of their emotions, manage them to a reasonable degree, pick up on social cues, and maintain professional relationships, but there is room to grow in each area. A closer look at individual items tells the story. In emotional awareness, teachers readily agreed that emotions matter in their work ( $M = 3.61$ , the highest item), yet they scored lowest on willingness to share their true feelings with others ( $M = 3.00$ ). Keller et al. (2021) reported a similar pattern and linked it to the emotional dissonance that arises when teachers feel pressure to stay neutral and professional at all times.

Emotional management painted a familiar picture for anyone who has worked in a Philippine public school. Teachers took responsibility for their reactions ( $M = 3.64$ , high), but when it came to accepting criticism calmly, holding composure during stressful moments, or avoiding unhealthy coping habits, scores dipped to 3.24 each. Kariou et al. (2021) would call this a textbook effect of emotional labor and workload pressure. Social emotional awareness followed the same moderate trend. Teachers knew when to speak and when to hold back ( $M = 3.47$ ) but struggled to support others during sensitive moments like delivering bad news ( $M = 3.10$ )—a skill that Rivers et al. (2022) argued requires deliberate, structured training. Relationship management recorded the lowest domain mean at 3.26. Teachers felt their close relationships were safe ( $M = 3.65$ ), yet they did not see themselves as particularly sociable or fun in informal settings ( $M = 2.99$ ). Mérida-López and Extremera (2020) attributed this gap to occupational fatigue: after a full day of managing 40-plus students, there is simply not much social energy left.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Learners' Engagement*

Area	Overall Mean	Interpretation
Classroom Learning Activities	4.32	High Level
Extracurricular Activities	4.06	High Level
Community Service and Volunteering	4.03	High Level

On the learner side, the numbers were encouraging. Students were highly engaged across all three areas. In the classroom ( $M = 4.32$ ), rule-following topped the list ( $M = 4.43$ ), which speaks well of disciplinary culture in these schools. But applying critical thinking and problem-solving came in last ( $M = 4.12$ )—still high, yet it flags a gap that Benedicto and Andrade (2022) have documented in Philippine classrooms where rote instruction still dominates. Extracurricular engagement ( $M = 4.06$ ) was strong when it came to supporting school events and committing to activities (both at  $M = 4.27$ ), though formal club membership lagged behind at 3.85. For community service ( $M = 4.03$ ), students reflected meaningfully on their volunteering experiences



(M = 4.11) but showed less enthusiasm for charity and fundraising (M = 3.90)—not surprising given the economic realities many of their families face.

**Table 4**

*Comparative Analysis of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence by Age (Mann–Whitney U Test)*

EI Domain	Category	N	Mean Rank	U	p	Sig.
Emotional Awareness	Younger	66	58.64	1659.50	.006	S
	Older	69	76.95			
Emotional Management	Younger	66	54.52	1387.50	.000	S
	Older	69	80.89			
Social Emotional Awareness	Younger	66	59.66	1726.50	.015	S
	Older	69	75.98			
Relationship Management	Younger	66	54.22	1367.50	.000	S
	Older	69	81.18			

Age made a real difference. In every single EI domain, older teachers outsourced younger ones by a statistically significant margin. The widest gaps showed up in emotional management (mean ranks of 54.52 vs. 80.89,  $p < .001$ ) and relationship management (54.22 vs. 81.18,  $p < .001$ ). This is not hard to explain: teachers who have spent 15 or 20 years navigating parent complaints, student meltdowns, and shifting DepEd policies have, by necessity, built thicker emotional armor than someone in their first five years. Aldrup et al. (2023) came to the same conclusion in their systematic review. What is notable here is that neither educational attainment nor income produced significant differences in any of the four domains. That suggests emotional intelligence is more about lived experience than about holding a master's degree or earning a higher salary—a finding that should interest those who design teacher-induction programs.

**Table 5**

*Comparative Analysis of Learners' Engagement by Age (Mann–Whitney U Test)*

Engagement Area	Category	N	Mean Rank	U	p	Sig.
Classroom Learning	Younger	66	63.85	2003.00	.225	NS
	Older	69	71.97			
Extracurricular	Younger	66	60.40	1775.50	.027	S
	Older	69	75.27			
Community Service	Younger	66	60.38	1774.00	.026	S
	Older	69	75.29			

When it came to learner engagement, the picture was a bit different. Classroom learning did not vary significantly by teacher age ( $p = .225$ )—whether a teacher is 28 or 48, students seem equally willing to follow rules, submit homework, and participate in discussions. But outside the classroom, teacher age mattered. Learners under older teachers were significantly more engaged in extracurricular activities ( $p = .027$ ) and community service ( $p = .026$ ). One likely explanation



is that veteran teachers tend to hold more institutional authority, have deeper community ties, and know how to rally students for events and outreach—skills that younger teachers are still developing (Buckley & Lee, 2018). Once again, educational attainment and income showed no significant effects.

**Table 6**

*Relational Analysis Between Teachers' EI and Learners' Engagement*

Correlates	N	rho	Sig. Level	p-value	Interpretation
Teachers' EI	135	0.475	0.05	.000	Significant
Learners' Engagement	135				

And here is the study's headline finding. Spearman's rho came in at 0.475 ( $p < .001$ )—a moderate positive correlation that clears the significance bar by a wide margin. In plain terms, teachers who scored higher on emotional intelligence also had more engaged students. The relationship is not iron-clad (no correlation in social science research ever is), but it is strong enough to act on. Reyes et al. (2020) reported a comparable pattern, showing that the emotional climate a teacher sets in the classroom ripples outward into student participation, effort, and achievement. For school administrators, the takeaway is practical: investing in teachers' emotional growth is not a soft initiative—it has measurable ties to how students show up, both academically and socially.

### Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether teachers' emotional intelligence was connected to how actively their students participated in school life. The answer, based on data from 135 teachers in a Central Philippine district, is yes. Teachers rated themselves moderately across all four EI domains—they are aware of their emotions and manage them reasonably well, but they hold back on emotional expression, struggle under stress, and find informal socializing difficult. Their students, by contrast, were highly engaged in class, in extracurriculars, and in community service, though critical thinking and club membership lagged. Age proved to be the key differentiator for emotional intelligence: older teachers scored higher in every domain, and their students showed stronger extracurricular and community involvement. The correlation between EI and engagement ( $\rho = 0.475$ ) was statistically significant and practically meaningful.

What should schools do with these findings? Several programs are proposed. "Project Open Heart" would create safe spaces for teachers to practice emotional expression through writing and dialogue circles. "Healthy Habits for Educators" would address stress regulation through mindfulness and wellness coaching. "Compassionate Communication Training" would build skills for handling sensitive conversations. "Teachers' Social Wellness Circles" would encourage informal bonding through creative clubs and team retreats. On the student side, "Inquiry Circles" would push critical thinking through project-based learning, the "Inclusive Clubs Initiative" would broaden extracurricular options, and "Bayanihan sa Paaralan" would embed service-learning into the curriculum. Together, these programs could help DepEd move





from policy rhetoric to ground-level change—strengthening the emotional backbone of the teaching profession while giving students richer, more meaningful reasons to stay engaged.

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### Conflict of Interest

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