

Original Article

Dimensions of teachers' emotional intelligence and its impact on classroom management: modeling in Iranian secondary schools

Neda Espid ¹ , Fatemeh Ahmadi Tabar ² , Leila Ghazaghi ^{3*} 

¹ Department of Clinical Psychology, BA.C., Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas, Iran.

² Department of General Psychology, Payam Noor University, Tehran, Iran.

³ Department of Educational Governance and Human Capital, Ker.C., Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran.

* **Corresponding author and reprints: Leila Ghazaghi**, Department of Educational Governance and Human Capital, Ker.C., Islamic Azad University, Kermanshah, Iran.

Email: leila.ghazaghi@iau.ac.ir

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Abstract

Background: This research explored the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) and classroom management in Iran's distinct educational environment, where organizational hierarchies and systemic challenges may influence EI's impact differently compared to Western contexts.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving 400 secondary school teachers (67% female; 36.8% early-career) from five Iranian provinces. Quantitative data were collected using established measures of emotional intelligence and classroom management, analyzed through structural equation modeling. Qualitative insights were drawn from 30 in-depth interviews, thematically analyzed, with methodological triangulation used to enhance reliability.

Results: Key outcomes include: Emotion regulation was the strongest predictor of behavior management ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$), though its impact diminished by 31% in overcrowded classrooms; Cultural adaptation was widespread (73%), with educators adjusting Western EI techniques to align with local norms; and Early-career teachers depended more on EI (accounting for 39% of variance) compared to experienced colleagues (28%), despite the latter's higher overall management scores (3.8 vs. 3.2, $p<0.001$). Systemic challenges such as large class sizes (65%), exam-centric pressures (92%), and insufficient training (87%) consistently hindered EI application.

Conclusion: While fundamental EI skills retain cross-cultural validity, their efficacy in Iran is heavily influenced by contextual factors. The findings highlight the need for EI training programs that integrate cultural relevance, structural considerations, and career-stage variations. This study advances global EI discourse by illustrating how educational frameworks and cultural dynamics shape the practical use of emotional pedagogy.

Keywords: analysis [Subheading]; Cultural Competency; Emotional Intelligence; Education; Iran; organization and administration [Subheading].

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Introduction

Classroom management plays a pivotal role in fostering a productive learning environment, particularly in middle schools, where students experience rapid emotional and

developmental changes. A key factor influencing classroom dynamics is teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and respond to emotions effectively which

has been shown to significantly impact teaching success and student engagement (1, 2).

Growing evidence suggests that teachers with higher EI demonstrate greater teaching effectiveness, lower burnout rates, and more positive classroom climates (1). Meta-analyses further reinforce this connection, revealing that EI contributes to academic success beyond general intelligence and personality traits, with particularly pronounced effects in secondary education (3, 4).

Additionally, emotionally intelligent teachers tend to employ more collaborative and adaptive strategies in conflict resolution, leading to healthier classroom interactions (5). These competencies not only strengthen teacher-student relationships but also reduce occupational stress, improve job retention, and enhance overall well-being (5, 6).

Despite these global insights, research on EI and classroom management in Iran's middle schools remains limited. While some studies on Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers have explored links between EI components (e.g., "general mood") and teaching styles (7), few have directly examined how EI influences classroom management strategies and student outcomes in this context.

This study aims to examine the multidimensional structure of emotional intelligence (EI) among Iranian middle school teachers and its impact on classroom management effectiveness. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions: (1) Which dimensions of EI—such as emotional perception, regulation, and empathy—are most strongly associated with effective discipline, behavior management, and overall classroom climate? (2) How do these EI dimensions interact to influence classroom management outcomes in the cultural context of Iran?

The study adopts a structural equation modeling approach to test these relationships, providing a culturally grounded analysis of EI in educational settings. The novelty of this research lies in integrating multiple EI dimensions into a comprehensive model and examining their combined effect on classroom management, thus offering insights for tailored professional development programs that equip educators with culturally relevant EI skills to enhance teaching quality, teacher performance, and student achievement

Methods

Research Setting, Study Population, and Conceptual Model

This study focused on Iranian secondary school teachers (grades 7–12) during the 2023–2024 school year, examining how emotional intelligence (EI) dimensions influence classroom management practices. The conceptual model posits that EI is a multidimensional construct comprising four branches—perceiving, facilitating, understanding, and managing emotions—which directly affect classroom management outcomes, including behavior management, instructional management, and fostering student relationships. Additionally, the model allows for mediating and moderating effects, hypothesizing that some EI dimensions may exert stronger effects depending on teacher experience or contextual factors.

A stratified random sampling approach was used to select 400 full-time educators with at least one year of experience, ensuring representation across five major provinces (Tehran, Isfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Fars, and Gilan), diverse school settings (public/private, urban/rural), and varying career stages (early-career to veteran teachers). Sample size was determined through power analysis to detect moderate effects with 95% confidence

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involved sequential mixed methods, beginning with validated Persian adaptations of the MSCEIT 2.0 (emotional intelligence assessment) and Teacher Classroom Management Scale, administered through three waves of online surveys to minimize response bias. The subsequent qualitative phase included in-depth interviews with 30 purposefully selected teachers (balanced by EI scores) and classroom observations to contextualize survey findings.

This study employed two standardized and validated instruments, both adapted for the Persian cultural and linguistic context:

1. ***Persian Adaptation of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT v2.0)***: This is a performance-based (ability) test that objectively measures the four branches of emotional intelligence (EI) as defined by Mayer and Salovey: perceiving, facilitating, understanding, and managing emotions. Unlike self-report questionnaires, it assesses actual ability through a series of emotion-based tasks. The Persian version ensures linguistic and cultural appropriateness for the Iranian sample.
2. ***Persian Adaptation of the Teacher Classroom Management Scale***: This is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure teachers' perceptions of their own classroom management skills. It typically assesses key components such as behavior management, instructional management, and fostering student relationships. The adapted Persian version guarantees that the items are contextually relevant and accurately understood by Iranian teachers.

Statistical Analysis

Analytical procedures combined advanced statistical techniques with qualitative exploration. Quantitative data underwent structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships, supplemented by mediation and moderation analyses.

Qualitative data was systematically examined through thematic analysis, with multiple coders ensuring interpretive reliability. The research design incorporated several validation strategies, including methodological triangulation and participant feedback loops.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols guaranteed participant anonymity through coded identifiers, secure data management systems, and voluntary participation with option to withdraw. Institutional approvals and informed consent procedures were obtained prior to data collection, aligning with international standards for educational research involving human subjects.

Results

Our mixed-methods investigation with 400 Iranian secondary educators yielded three significant insights: First, thematic analysis uncovered three predominant patterns - widespread cultural adaptation of EI techniques (with 78% of teachers modifying Western approaches), pervasive systemic challenges (reported by 92% of participants), and predominantly experiential skill acquisition (87% lacked institutional training). Second, structural equation modeling identified emotion regulation as the most robust determinant of classroom management effectiveness ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$), though its impact was substantially mediated by contextual factors - showing 31% diminished efficacy in overcrowded classrooms (>35 students) and 24% reduction attributable to cultural power distance norms. Third, data integration revealed a U-shaped trajectory in EI application across career stages, with novice teachers demonstrating particularly strong EI dependence (accounting for 42% of variance versus 27% among veterans).

These outcomes collectively affirm two critical propositions: while fundamental EI capacities maintain cross-cultural validity, their practical implementation in Iran's examination-focused, hierarchical

Table 1. Demographic Composition of Study Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	268	67%
	Male	132	33%
Teaching Experience	<5 years	147	36.8%
	5-15 years	186	46.5%
	>15 years	67	16.7%
School Type	Urban Public	215	53.8%
	Rural Public	122	30.5%
	Private	63	15.7%

educational system requires thoughtful contextualization. The findings advocate for professional development initiatives that simultaneously cultivate core emotion regulation competencies while pragmatically addressing environmental constraints like excessive class sizes. Notably, the identified developmental pattern suggests distinct training needs for educators at different career stages, with early-career teachers potentially benefiting most from targeted EI support.

The sample demonstrated the following characteristics Table 1.

Analysis of teacher interviews revealed three interconnected themes shaping emotional intelligence (EI) implementation in Iranian classrooms: First, widespread cultural adaptation (73%) manifested through modified EI strategies better suited to local communication norms, such as using indirect nonverbal cues rather than direct confrontation when managing behavior. Second, systemic barriers - particularly curriculum rigidity and exam pressures - were reported by 65% of teachers as primary constraints, often forcing them to deprioritize emotional aspects of teaching despite recognizing their value. Third, an overwhelming training deficit (87%) left most educators developing EI competencies through personal experience rather than formal professional development. These findings collectively demonstrate how Iranian teachers navigate a complex landscape where cultural expectations demand emotionally astute teaching, yet structural realities and inadequate preparation create

significant implementation challenges. The results highlight the critical need for EI training programs that simultaneously address skill development while accounting for the unique contextual barriers present in Iran's exam-driven educational system, suggesting that effective interventions must extend beyond individual teacher training to address systemic constraints as well Table 2.

The SEM analysis uncovered differentiated predictive patterns between emotional intelligence (EI) dimensions and classroom management components, offering nuanced insights into their relationships. Emotion regulation demonstrated the most robust association with behavior management ($\beta=0.42$, $p<0.001$), confirming its pivotal role in effectively addressing classroom disruptions and maintaining disciplinary standards. Emotion perception emerged as a significant contributor to positive classroom climate ($\beta=0.35$, $P=0.003$), suggesting that accurately recognizing emotional cues serves as a fundamental prerequisite for creating responsive learning environments. The analysis further identified emotion utilization as meaningfully linked to instructional management ($\beta=0.28$, $P=0.012$), indicating its value in facilitating flexible teaching approaches tailored to students' needs. While emotion understanding showed relatively weaker predictive power, it still made statistically significant contributions to teacher-student relationship quality ($\beta=0.19$, $P=0.047$), underscoring its relevance for fostering meaningful classroom interactions. These differential

Table 2. Emergent Themes from Qualitative Data Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Representative Quotes	Prevalence	Interpretation
Cultural Adaptation	Indirect Communication	"In our culture, a disappointed glance works better than direct confrontation when students misbehave"	73%	Highlights the need for culture-specific EI applications in hierarchical settings
	Respect for Hierarchy	"Students are more receptive when authority figures are involved in discussions"	68%	Emphasizes hierarchical influences on emotional interactions
	Contextual Flexibility	"We adapt our responses depending on the classroom dynamics"	61%	Shows the importance of situational adaptation in emotional intelligence (EI) application
Structural Barriers	Curriculum Pressure	"With 34 students and national exams looming, emotional support becomes a luxury we can't afford"	65%	Reveals systemic constraints limiting EI implementation
	Time Constraints	"Teachers often have no time to focus on emotional aspects due to overloaded schedules"	72%	Highlights how workload hinders EI integration
	Resource Limitations	"Lack of training materials and support restricts our ability to implement EI strategies"	54%	Demonstrates the effect of limited resources on EI practice
	Experiential Learning	"I've never received EI training – everything I know comes from trial and error over 8 years of teaching"	87%	Exposes critical gaps in teacher professional development
Training Deficits	Inconsistent Training	"Some workshops cover EI, but they are irregular and not standardized"	62%	Indicates variability in professional development
	Lack of Follow-up	"After initial training, there is no continuous support or mentorship"	58%	Points to the need for ongoing guidance for skill consolidation

associations collectively illustrate how distinct EI facets play specialized yet complementary roles in various aspects of classroom management, with emotion regulation emerging as particularly crucial for maintaining order in Iran's secondary education context, where large class sizes and disciplinary challenges are prevalent Table 3 for complete results. The findings provide empirical support for targeted professional development programs that address these specific EI competencies in relation to their corresponding classroom management functions.

The study's examination of environmental moderators yielded important insights into how contextual factors shape the translation of emotional intelligence (EI) into effective classroom management. Large class sizes emerged as a particularly significant

constraint, with classrooms exceeding 35 students reducing the efficacy of emotion regulation strategies by 31% ($\Delta R^2=0.10$, $P=0.004$) - a finding that aligns with teachers' reports of struggling to provide individualized attention during behavioral incidents in overcrowded conditions. Cultural dimensions similarly influenced outcomes, as prevailing power distance norms attenuated the benefits of emotion perception by 22% ($\Delta R^2=0.07$, $P=0.021$), suggesting that hierarchical classroom dynamics may suppress genuine emotional exchanges. On the supportive side, robust administrative backing amplified the impact of emotion utilization by 15% ($\Delta R^2=0.05$, $P=0.032$), indicating that institutional encouragement facilitates teachers' ability to implement emotionally-responsive instructional innovations.

Table 3. Standardized Path Coefficients for EI Dimensions Predicting Classroom Management

Predictor (EI Dimension)	Outcome (Management Aspect)	β	SE	P -value	Practical Interpretation
Emotion Regulation	Behavior Management	0.42	0.05	<0.001	Most critical skill for handling disruptions
Emotion Perception	Positive Classroom Climate	0.35	0.06	0.003	Foundational for responsive teaching
Emotion Utilization	Instructional Management	0.28	0.07	0.012	Enables adaptive pedagogy
Emotion Understanding	Teacher-Student Relationships	0.19	0.08	0.047	Impacts relational quality

Table 4. Moderation Effects of Contextual Factors

Moderator	Impact on EI-Management Relationship	ΔR^2	P-value	Case Example
Class Size (>35)	31% reduction in regulation's effect	0.10	0.004	Limits 1:1 Interactions
Power Distance	22% reduction in perception's effect	0.07	0.021	Restricts emotional expression
Administrative Support	15% boost in utilization's effect	0.05	0.032	Enables innovative methods

These patterns collectively reveal how the physical environment (class size), cultural context (power distance), and organizational support systems interact to either enable or constrain teachers' application of EI competencies in authentic classroom situations Table 4. The results highlight that EI training programs must account for these contextual realities to be truly effective, moving beyond skill development alone to address the environmental conditions that shape how these skills are ultimately applied in practice.

The comparative analysis between novice and experienced educators uncovered significant differences in how emotional intelligence (EI) relates to classroom management across career stages. Among early-career teachers (<5 Years Experience), EI competencies accounted for 39% of the variance in management outcomes significantly more than the 28% explained for veteran educators (>15 Years Experience), with this 11-percentage-point difference representing a medium effect size ($t=3.21$, $d=0.52$). This pattern suggests EI serves as a foundational skill set that new teachers actively employ to navigate classroom challenges. Paradoxically, despite their greater reliance on EI, novice teachers demonstrated markedly lower actual behavior management performance ($M=3.2$, $SD=0.8$) compared to veterans ($M=3.8$, $SD=0.6$), with this 0.6-point difference on a 5-point scale representing a substantial performance gap ($t=4.07$, $d=0.65$).

These findings illuminate the developmental trajectory of teaching expertise: while emotional intelligence forms a crucial framework for beginning teachers' practice, experienced educators appear to integrate these competencies with accumulated pedagogical knowledge and situational wisdom that enhances their overall effectiveness. The results suggest an evolving relationship between EI and classroom competence across the professional lifespan where explicit emotional skills dominate early practice but become more automatic and supplemented by other forms of expertise over time. This has important implications for professional development, indicating the need for differentiated support systems: scaffolded EI training for novices, and opportunities for veteran teachers to reflectively integrate their emotional competencies with their extensive practical knowledge. The study highlights how recognizing these developmental patterns can inform more targeted, career-stage-appropriate teacher support programs Table 5.

Discussion

This study provides compelling evidence that emotion regulation serves as the cornerstone of effective classroom management ($\beta = 0.41$, $P < 0.001$), corroborating existing meta-analytic research demonstrating its dual role in enhancing both teacher well-being and instructional effectiveness (8).

Table 5. Novice vs. Veteran Teacher Comparisons

Variable	Novice (<5 yrs)	Veteran (>15 yrs)	t-test	Effect Size (d)
EI's Explained Variance	39%	28%	$t=3.21$	0.52
Behavior Management Scores	3.2 (0.8)	3.8 (0.6)	$t=4.07$	0.65

The robust predictive power of this EI dimension confirms that the capacity to manage emotional responses constitutes not just an ancillary skill but a fundamental requirement for sustainable teaching practice, particularly in emotionally charged classroom environments.

However, our analysis reveals important boundary conditions for this relationship. The 31% attenuation of emotion regulation's effectiveness in overcrowded classrooms (≥ 35 students) empirically validates what educators have long reported anecdotally - that excessive class sizes fundamentally constrain teachers' ability to implement even well-developed emotional competencies. This finding dovetails with emerging literature on the cognitive and emotional toll of large classes (9), suggesting that systemic reforms addressing class size may be prerequisite for realizing the full benefits of EI training initiatives.

The cultural moderation effects proved equally noteworthy. The 22% reduction in emotion perception's predictive power under high power distance norms provides quantitative support for critiques of Western-centric EI models (10), demonstrating how hierarchical educational contexts can inhibit the open emotional exchange upon which many evidence-based strategies depend. This cultural mediation effect was further elaborated in our qualitative findings, where 78% of teachers reported adapting Western EI approaches to better align with Iranian communication norms - often favoring indirect emotional cues over explicit emotional dialogue.

Three systemic barriers emerged with striking consistency:

1. Pervasive structural constraints (reported by 92% of participants)
2. Critical training deficits (87% lacking formal EI preparation)

3. Heavy reliance on experiential learning among novices

These findings align with growing recognition of an EI training gap in teacher development programs (11), while also pointing to promising intervention research demonstrating that EI cultivation can be effectively integrated into existing training frameworks without compromising content mastery (12).

The career-stage analysis revealed a nuanced developmental trajectory, with EI explaining 42% of management variance among novices versus 27% among veterans. This pattern supports professional identity models (13) that conceptualize teaching expertise as evolving from explicit competency application toward more integrated, experience-informed practice. Notably, our data suggest this transition occurs not through EI's diminished relevance, but rather through its gradual integration with other forms of professional wisdom.

The moderating role of administrative support (15% enhancement of emotion utilization effects) underscores the institutional dimensions of emotional pedagogy. This finding reinforces evidence that transformational leadership and supportive organizational climates serve as force multipliers for teachers' emotional competencies (14, 15), enabling more innovative and responsive classroom practices.

These findings provide a comparative perspective on teacher emotional intelligence (EI) in relation to traditional assumptions versus new insights from this study.

First, while traditional views often conceptualize EI as an individual attribute largely independent of context, our results demonstrate that its impact on classroom outcomes is deeply shaped by cultural norms, structural conditions, and organizational contexts. In contrast to simplistic individual-deficit perspectives,

these findings highlight that teachers' emotional practices cannot be separated from the ecosystems in which they operate.

Second, conventional models of teaching expertise typically focus on static skill sets or experience-based progression. In comparison, our study advances a developmental model capturing the evolving relationship between emotional competencies and classroom practice across career stages. Novice teachers rely more on basic EI strategies, whereas veteran teachers integrate these competencies more effectively within complex classroom environments.

Third, whereas prior approaches often advocate isolated interventions targeting individual skill-building, the current evidence underscores the need for comprehensive frameworks addressing multiple levels simultaneously. This includes culturally adapted EI strategies, systemic reforms (e.g., class size, administrative support), and career-stage-specific training. Unlike earlier recommendations, this approach recognizes that developing teachers' EI is a shared responsibility, requiring coordinated efforts spanning personal growth, cultural adaptation, and institutional transformation.

Ultimately, this comparative perspective repositions EI from a static personal trait to a dynamic professional capacity, emphasizing how it both influences and is influenced by the complex educational environments of teachers

Conclusion

This investigation makes several important contributions to our understanding of emotional intelligence (EI) in educational contexts, particularly within Iran's distinctive secondary school environment. The study establishes that while core EI competencies especially emotion regulation serve as significant predictors of effective classroom management, their practical implementation and effectiveness

are substantially mediated by contextual factors unique to the Iranian educational landscape. Three critical findings emerge: first, systemic challenges including overcrowded classrooms, exam-driven curricula, and inadequate professional development opportunities consistently constrain teachers' ability to apply EI principles, regardless of their individual skill levels. Second, the observed disparity between novice and veteran teachers reveals a complex developmental trajectory where beginning educators demonstrate heavier reliance on explicit EI skills yet achieve poorer management outcomes compared to experienced colleagues who integrate emotional competencies with accumulated practical wisdom. Third, the research highlights how cultural norms influence the expression and effectiveness of EI, necessitating adaptations of Western-derived frameworks to align with local communication styles and power dynamics.

These insights carry important implications for teacher development programs in Middle Eastern contexts. Rather than adopting generic EI training models, the findings advocate for multilayered interventions that simultaneously address: (1) individual skill development through culturally-adapted EI instruction; (2) institutional reforms to reduce class sizes and modify exam pressures; and (3) career-stage-specific support that recognizes the evolving role of EI across a teacher's professional journey. By demonstrating how emotional pedagogy interacts with cultural, structural, and developmental factors, this study advances a more nuanced conceptualization of EI one that transcends universalist assumptions and instead recognizes emotional teaching practices as complex negotiations between individual capacities and contextual realities. The research ultimately argues for reconceptualizing effective classroom management as both an emotional and ecological competence, requiring attention to the broader systems in which teachers exercise their emotional skills.

Authors' contribution

Neda Espid and Fatemeh Ahmadi Tabar developed the study concept and design. Leila Ghazaghi and Fatemeh Ahmadi Tabar acquired the data. Neda Espid and Fatemeh Ahmadi Tabar analyzed and interpreted the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the intellectual content, manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

Informed consent

Questionnaires were filled with the participants' satisfaction and written consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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