

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EMPATHY AND SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AMONG EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS[‡]

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Abstract

The present study explored the emotional intelligence (EI) of 104 teachers from Armenian schools in Lebanon, providing a detailed analysis of key emotional competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and the ability to recognize emotions in others. A particular emphasis was placed on empathy, examining it as a powerful tool for reducing social stereotypes, especially within the context of teaching. The research found a significant negative correlation between empathy and social stereotypes, particularly concerning the teaching profession and age. This suggests that teachers with higher levels of empathy tend to exhibit fewer biases and stereotypes in their approach to education. Additionally, the study presented a set of recommendations aimed at teachers, school leaders, and policymakers. These suggestions are intended to guide the development of strategies for fostering more inclusive and empathetic school environments, ultimately contributing to the creation of communities that are more understanding and accepting within educational settings.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, social skills, empathy, stereotypes, teacher development, self-awareness, equity, education.

INTRODUCTION

Life in the 21st century is evolving quickly and scientific research and pedagogical literature that used to grow on yearly and decade basis, is now currently at a quicker pace and our pedagogical tools curricula and teaching strategies need to target the needs of the learners in this century. The classrooms of today are preparing the leaders of the third millennium and education

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needs to help learners survive and thrive today and transform the future to be more inclusive, tolerant and kind, so all communities grow forward.

Education and the effective tools and methods to prepare the citizens of tomorrow and instill in them skills for life have been an important question to be answered throughout the past decades and especially in the post pandemic world. All researches in the field aim to understand how one can help prepare the successful and happy citizens of tomorrow? What are the skills of the future leaders? How can schools prepare students for life? More than a decade ago, Goleman highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, telling the Harvard Business Review “The most effective leaders are all alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. (Goleman, 1995)

The process of preparing leaders offers a growing body of social science research is focusing on mental health and emotional wellbeing and is offering evidence that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in life success and personal happiness. Phrases such as know your emotions, manage your emotions, recognize and read emotions in others are heard during job interviews and individuals are to know and master these skills yet they are not taught at school or during university years.

Life pre and post pandemic offered an opportunity to the world, to try and test the social skills theory in the social and education context as well. Understanding one’s self, relating to others, facing challenges with a positive outlook and showing resilience were all set to a test when learners and educators were physically apart. Educational systems underwent this same test to see the learning, development, effective relationship and survival skills that teachers offered to learners, to face a challenging period.

Forbes magazine considered social skills a vital requirement for the leaders of the future and empathy to be the new superpower of changemakers. Successful leaders have emotional intelligence and these “soft” skills give them an edge over other peers and offer them a chance for a happier life. They are kinder, more tolerant and show empathy towards others, thus little predispositions and stereotypes.

Harvard review in its 2021 research states that social emotional learning (SEL) is an essential skill for individuals to succeed in the 21st century workforce. SEL according to CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is an educational approach that helps people develop social skills and awareness of themselves and others. School-based SEL can help students improve their academic and interpersonal performance. It focuses on the positive behaviors of students instead of the negative behaviors to promote healthy youth development. It helps set school-wide policies that nurture individual differences and allow learners to reach their maximum

potential. SEL targets learners, parents, teachers, administrators and the community at the large, as all stakeholders, in the education system. Implementation of SEL curricula in schools, promises hope on the larger scale of preparing lifelong learners, competent learners, who know themselves well, are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and are empathetic citizens in their society. (CASEL, 2021)

SEL also helps create a safe haven for all learners, despite their capabilities and background, allowing collaboration and effective communication. These programs improve academic performance, raise self-esteem of learners and increase their chance of building and maintaining effective lifelong relationships. Such skills and competencies allow all learners, with different social levels, gender, capabilities... to live experiences inside school walls that prepare them for life outside, in the community, being transformed to solution oriented active citizens.

Social Emotional learning is introduced to schools through school wide policies, and teacher trainings, along with preparation of resources. It is done through specific sessions pre-planned for SEL activities along with instructional strategies that target the emotional wellbeing of learners and allows them to practice these skills and master them.

Emotional competencies can be divided into personal competencies such as self-awareness where accurate self-assessment is crucial and offering learners opportunities to identify their strengths weaknesses dreams and goals along with answering questions of who they are, can yield self-confidence. Self-management on the other hand focuses mainly on how individuals can practice self-control, become trustworthy, predictable, transparent citizens that are able to change and adapt where needed, as well as inspire trust in relationships. They are individuals who are aware of their triggers and motives and know how to regulate their thoughts, words and actions. These emotionally intelligent learners are motivated and know how to elevate their own level of energy along with that of those in their surrounding communities.

Social competencies on the other hand, focus on individuals serving others and their society, through empathetic approach, offering support and growth mindset. It is in social skills that emotional intelligence is evident through the actions of individuals in the community, such as building teamwork and collaboration spirit, communicating growth, developing each other and leading change, through becoming catalysts that embrace change and lead others towards new horizons (Chernis, Goleman, 2001).

Can personal and social competencies manifested through self-awareness and regulation on one hand and empathy, motivation and emotional coaching on the other hand be learned and acquired? If the answer to that question is yes by Mathew and Deary (2009), and Goleman (1995,1998) then the next question would be, where these skills need to be ideally taught? Mayer

and Salovey (1997) declare that a valid response to this question may be schools, the best sites to introduce social skills at early ages. They explain that ideally, human beings need to be introduced to emotional intelligence as early as they start school and learn skills like any other skill through educational institutions and curricula.

First, emotional intelligence was discussed as a thought and an added skill and luxury to one's life until the 21st century where it is considered a vital and essential component for life success and career performance. United Nations stated that "mental health is no more a luxury" it is rather a basic need according to the 2030 sustainable development goals.

According to research, emotional intelligence/Social Emotional learning creates positivity and tolerance at schools and minimizes social stereotype manifestations such as bullying. Thorough research on the website of the ministry of education in Lebanon until December 2022, showed that the Lebanese Ministry of Education, in all its curricula in languages, sciences, math and various arts, has not allocated a specific subject to be taught at schools. The education system followed in all public schools does not allocate sessions to target these skills nor does it give teachers guidelines, scope or sequence of objectives to follow and teach.

Research revealed that for these skills to be taught effectively at schools and yield highest results, teachers need to know about them, learn about them at the teacher preparatory courses, practice tools to introduce them in lesson planning and preparation and implement them in parallel to the academic work.

Schools as organizations, also evolved from the classic teacher centered traditional ones, to more contemporary modern digital phase. Taylor's theory explains that stereotypes are cognitive structures that represent general beliefs and expectations about a particular group of people. These beliefs are often based on limited information and used as mental "shortcuts" to help individuals process information quickly and make sense of the world around them. (Fiske, Taylor, 2020)

Empathy is 'the ability to experience affective and cognitive states of another person, whilst maintaining a distinct self, in order to understand the other'. This is consistent with the understanding that empathy includes at least two key dimensions: cognition and affect (Decety, 2011). If cognitive empathy can be conceptualized as 'I understand how you feel', affective empathy is conceptualized as 'I feel what you feel' (Hein and Singer, 2008).

Intersubjectivity refers to the shared understanding or mutual awareness that people develop when they engage with one another. It's the process through which individuals connect, align, and make sense of each other's thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. In a social context, it involves recognizing that others have their own subjective experiences and viewpoints, and being able to relate to or understand them. Intersubjectivity helps facilitate empathy, communication, and

cooperation by creating common ground between people.

In research like that of Sheng and Han (2012), intersubjectivity is often used to describe situations where group members, despite differences in race, gender, or background, begin to see each other as part of a shared experience or goal. This mutual understanding can reduce biases and enhance empathic responses to others.

Guthridge, M., Penovic, T., Kirkman, M. et al. 2023 acknowledge that empathy is not a cure for all stereotypes in the social content, yet it allows individuals to put themselves in others' shoes, feel with them and understand their feelings, thus leading to a less prejudice and discrimination.

Empathy is a promised hope to creating more sustainable communities based on equality, tolerance and acceptance, thus minimizing the manifestation of stereotypes in these societies.

The study aimed to present a background knowledge and literature review about the importance of emotional intelligence and social emotional learning in lives of teachers as they prepare the leaders of tomorrow. Next it shed light on the emotional intelligence of teachers, specifically their empathy levels and sought a correlation with social age-related social stereotypes in schools in Lebanon. It aimed to highlight the presence of a negative relationship between these attributes and propose recommendation on effective ways of introducing SEL programs into pedagogical institutions.

The study

1. Carried out an analysis of the literature devoted to the preparation of the leaders of the future.
2. Carried out an analysis of the literature devoted to the issue of emotional intelligence. Explain the syndrome of emotional intelligence, identify the components of emotional intelligence, present the characteristics.
3. Presented an overview about emotional intelligence of teachers in these schools.
4. Studied and investigated the correlation of age-related social stereotypes and emotional intelligence among educators.
5. Revealed the influence of the dominant expression of empathy among educators on the weak manifestation of social stereotypes.
6. Experimentally revealed the correlation between empathy and age-related social stereotypes of educators.

Education in post conflict and post war era in Lebanon needed to support civilians and their mental health as they move beyond the war time to an age where they feel safe, self-aware of their strengths and areas of development and move forward with motivation and a focus on building and maintaining healthy relationships with their surroundings and communities.

In the modern era, obtaining quality education, shaping future citizens, and preparing skilled educators is a key development challenge for nearly all societies. For the Armenian diaspora, particularly in Beirut, Lebanon, it has always been a top priority, influenced by the social stereotypes of the surrounding environment. While the issues of social stereotypes and emotional intelligence have been studied in fields like philosophy, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and linguistics, their exploration within the field of psychology remains underdeveloped and requires a fresh perspective. Various authors (Durlak J., Oberle E., Taylor R., Weissberg R.) have addressed the issue of social stereotypes, presenting different approaches based on their theoretical and methodological stances regarding the origins and characteristics of stereotypes. However, it is important to note that there is no universal definition of the term "social stereotype" in the field of socio-psychological sciences. Despite numerous studies and theories on emotional intelligence (D. Goleman, P. Salovey, J. Meyer, R. Boyatzis, B. Chernis, J. Durlak), the relationship between social stereotypes and emotional intelligence remains underexplored.

Thus, the comprehensive study of social stereotypes and emotional intelligence, particularly in relation to their connection and the impact of social stereotypes on emotional intelligence, becomes a primary issue in uncovering their interrelationship. This underscores the relevance of the topic.

In this research, for the first time in the context of the Lebanese Armenian community, the interrelationship between emotional intelligence and social stereotypes within the pedagogical collective has been examined. The study reveals the connection and interdependence between social stereotypes and emotional intelligence. It also uncovers those higher expressions of empathy led to a reduction in the manifestation of social stereotypes.

The ministry of education in Lebanon was set to work to create a framework for social emotional learning in Lebanon creating curricula for learners to target these skills inside classrooms. However, this search supports the need of understanding teachers and doing a pre-training to understand their emotional intelligence and specifically empathy levels, through an investigation to the current situation and seeking to find a correlation with the stereotypes manifested.

Empathy is the promised solution to the social problem of stereotypes. It aims to minimize intergroup and intragroup differences and allow the focus to be on similarities and common grounds, looking towards shared goals as communities rather than focusing on differences. Empathetic individuals understanding the different perspective, understand the feelings of others and allow them to be accepted for who they are, thus minimizing the discrimination.

METHODS

The current research used various tools to investigate and shed light on the presence of the social skills and the manifestation of social stereotypes in Armenian schools in the diaspora, Lebanon.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the current study were 104 educators (87 females and 17 males) from Armenian schools in Lebanon. The research began by contacting the principals of these schools and asking them to distribute the Google Form link to their teachers. Participants taught a variety of subjects and age groups, and they represented a wide range of teaching experience, both in terms of years of service and areas of expertise. The sample was obtained through a convenience sampling method, as participants were recruited based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The diversity of teaching experience and subject areas among the participants ensured a broad representation of the educational landscape within the Armenian schools in Lebanon.

INSTRUMENTS

The N. Hall's tool was used for assessing "emotional intelligence" (EQ questionnaire) 09.02.2017 Irina Andreeva 9 N. Hall's method for assessing "emotional intelligence" (EQ questionnaire) // E.I. Ilyin. Emotions and feelings. - St. Petersburg: Peter, 2001. - S. 633-634. N. Hall's technique is proposed to identify the ability to understand the relationship of the individual, represented in emotions and manage the emotional sphere on the basis of decision-making. It consists of 30 statements and contains 5 scales: 1) emotional awareness, 2) management of emotions (rather it is emotional outgoing, emotional non-rigidity), 3) self-motivation (rather, it is just arbitrary control of one's emotions, excluding paragraph 14), 4) empathy, 5) recognition of emotions of other people (rather - the ability to influence the emotional state of others).

The Boyko test-questionnaire (Boyko's empathy test: Methodology for diagnosing the level of empathic abilities allowed participants to identify the type or empathy presence whether low, medium or high in various domains. The diagnostic methodology of "Empathic ability level" proposed by V. Boyko aims to assess an individual's empathic abilities. Empathy refers to the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, and it plays a crucial role in human social interactions and relationships. Boyko's diagnostic methodology involves a comprehensive assessment process that combines self-report measures, behavioral observations, and physiological measurements. The goal is to provide a holistic understanding of an individual's empathic abilities across different dimensions.

It broke down the empathy into more measurable terms such as rational empath, emotional, intuitive. It elaborated on the source such as availability of settings that promote empathy, penetrating power or identification in empathy.

The instruments used in this research were specifically created to investigate the presence of social stereotypes within the target population. Two primary questionnaires were developed for this purpose:

1. Questionnaire for Assessment of Expression of Age Stereotypes: This questionnaire aimed to assess the participants' perceptions of age-related stereotypes within the teaching profession. It asked participants to evaluate the presence or absence of certain characteristics associated with young, experienced, and older teachers.

2. Questionnaire for Assessment of Expression of Teaching Profession Stereotypes: This questionnaire focused on identifying stereotypes related to the teaching profession itself. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements that reflected various social stereotypes associated with teaching.

Before the final administration of the instruments, both questionnaires underwent a pilot test with a random sample of 500 educators. This pilot study was conducted to ensure the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaires. Feedback from the pilot participants led to minor revisions in the wording and structure of certain items to improve their comprehensibility and effectiveness in measuring the intended constructs.

PROCEDURES and RESULTS

This study adhered to ethical guidelines throughout its design and implementation. Prior to data collection, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before they completed the questionnaires, ensuring that they understood the potential risks, benefits, and confidentiality measures associated with their involvement in the study. Participants' responses were anonymized and stored securely to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality.

The first section of the Google form that was shared with all participants was the demographics of the participants. Eighty-seven females and 17 males representing different age groups.

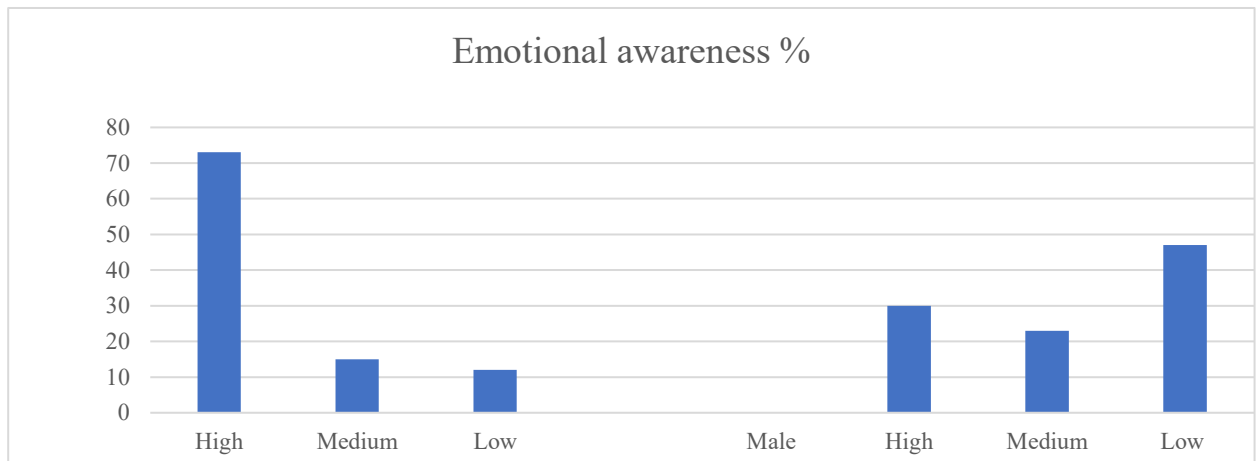


FIGURE 1: Self awareness of teachers on Hall's questionnaire

The participants were also representative of the years of teaching experience ranging from less than years in teaching to more than 30 years of experience.

The Hall's tool was used to measure the emotional awareness of the participants. When comparing males to females, females had higher self-awareness compared to males who scored less. When checked the overall self-awareness, the results were as follows:

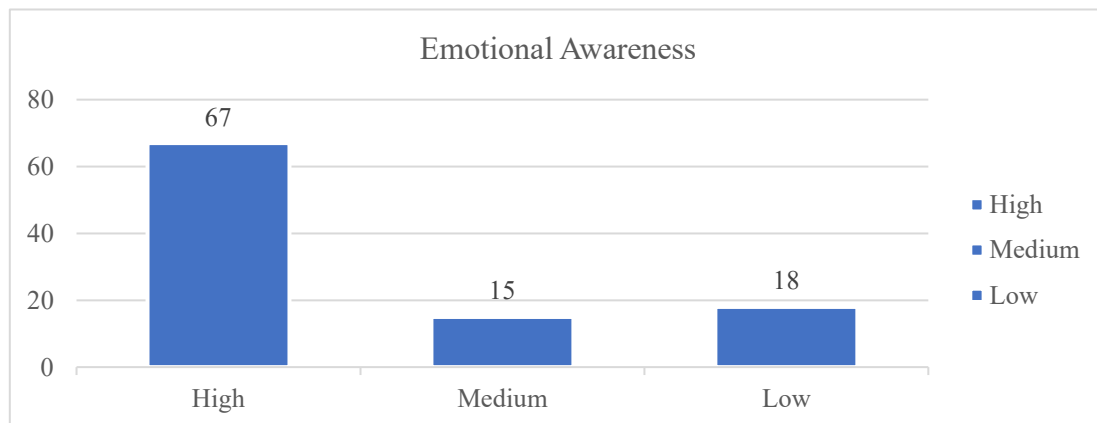


FIGURE 2. Emotional awareness of teachers using Hall's questionnaire

The teachers in these schools whether male or female, had high level (67%) and medium (15%) of self-awareness and self-knowledge.

The second aspect that was measured by Hall's tool was management of emotions. Similar results were found in terms of women having higher emotion control and regulation compared to men.

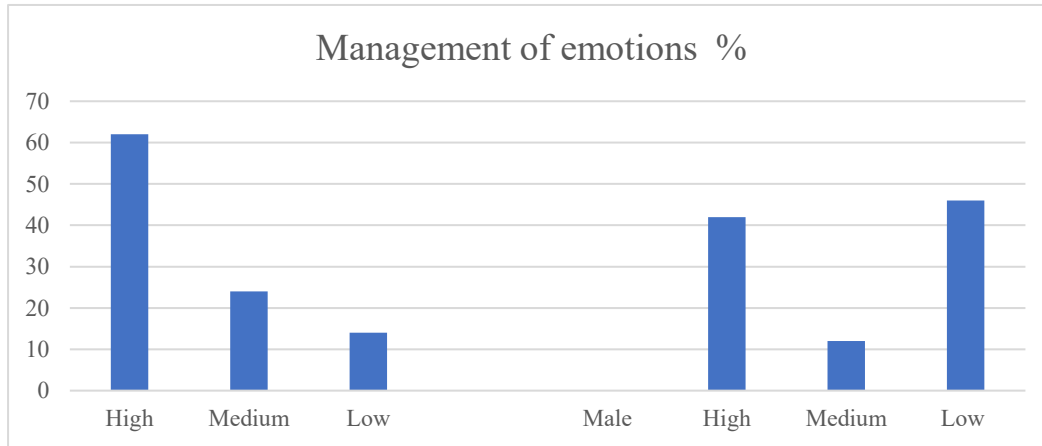


FIGURE 3: Management of emotions of teachers using Hall's questionnaire

Nevertheless, the general analysis of emotion management yielded overall, high level of emotion regulation ranging high 59% of participants, 22 medium emotion regulation skills and the remaining low emotion regulation skills of 19%.

The third aspect that was measured by Hall's tool was self-motivation. The results did not vary from the previous two components. Fifty six percent of the participants were highly motivated, while medium motivation and low motivation were shown 16 and 28 percent respectively.

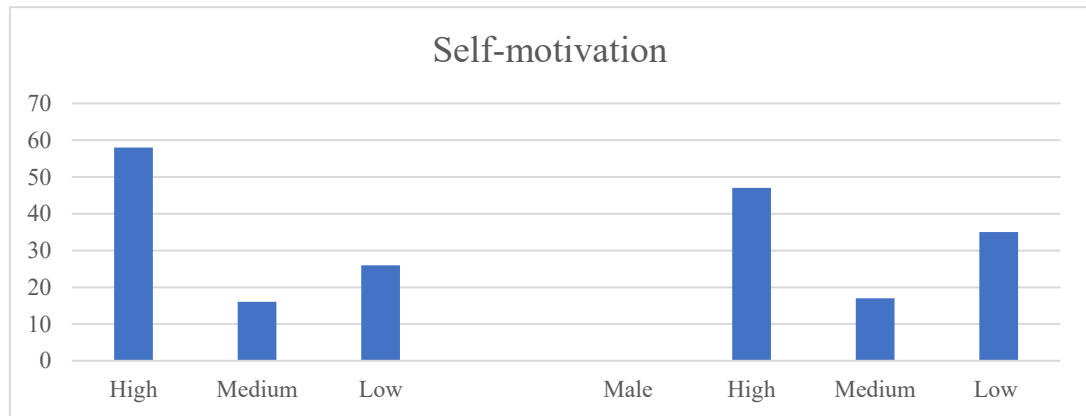


FIGURE 4. Motivation of teachers using Hall's questionnaire

The next section of the Hall's tool measured the social skills and the interpersonal capabilities.

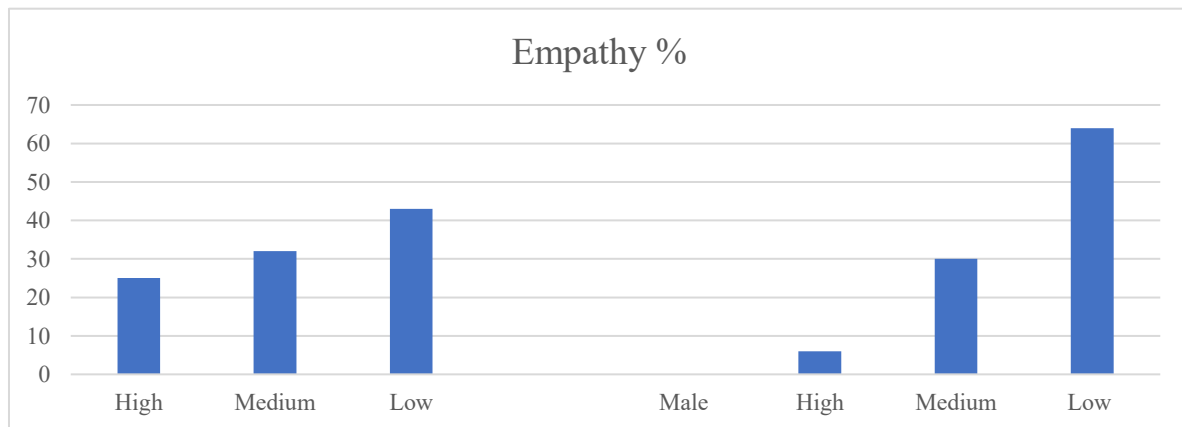


FIGURE 5: Empathy of teachers using Hall's questionnaire

Results there were different than the first section of intrapersonal skills and personal attributes. Forty three percent of females and 64% of males scored low empathy while scored overall was similar to the detailed description. An average of 53% of the general population scored low on empathy. Overall, 46% of the participants scored low on empathy, 32% medium and only 22% high.

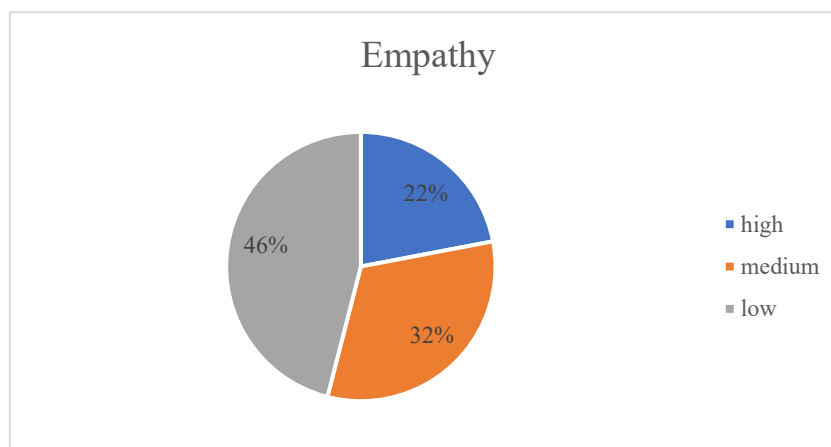


FIGURE 6. Empathy of teachers using Hall's questionnaire

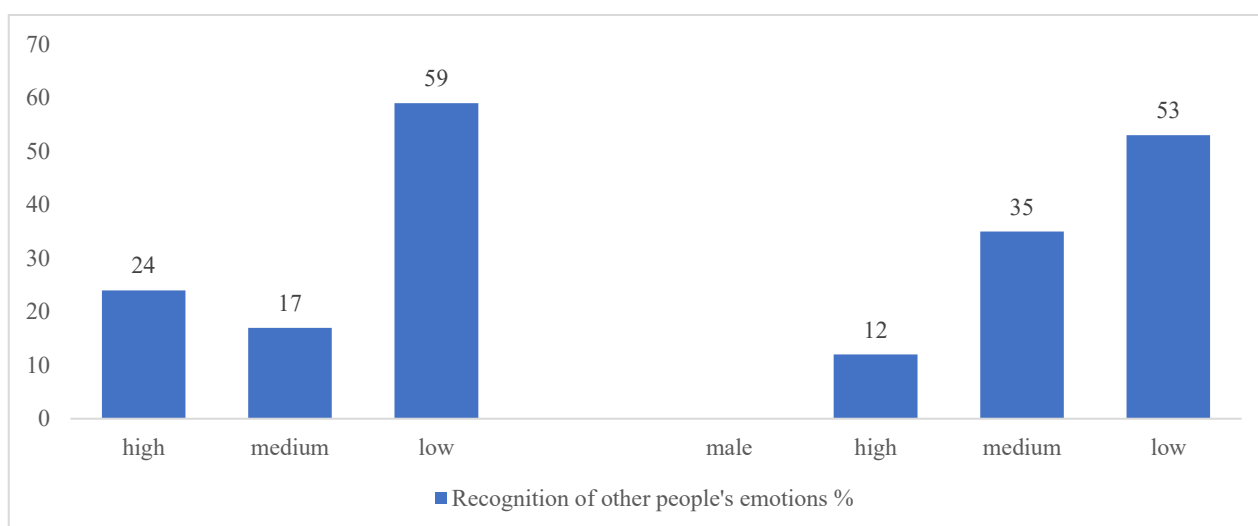


FIGURE 7. Recognition of teachers of others emotions using Hall's questionnaire

The final component was to evaluate the individual's capacity to recognize emotions in others. The results were as follows: Fifty nine percent of females and 53% of males scored low ability to recognize and read emotions in others. Fifty six percent of overall participants showed the low score in these skills and their need for improving the overall social skills.

Boyko's Empathy test was used next with social stereotypes (authored tools for this research).

DATA ANALYSIS[§]

Age-Related Stereotype

| Reliability Statistics | | |
|------------------------|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .722 | .711 | 26 |

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of the Author's Questionnaire for Assessing Stereotypes related to age of Educators.

Profession-Related Stereotype

| Reliability Statistics | | |
|------------------------|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .796 | .797 | 20 |

Table 2: Reliability Statistics of the Author's Questionnaire for Assessing Stereotypes in the

Professional Orientation of Educators

Pearson's correlation test revealed that there were significant, negative, and small to medium correlation between Boyko's empathy and social stereotypes related to teacher's age; $r = -.20$, $p = .042$ (one-tailed). As such, hypothesis that states that there is a negative association between Boyko's empathy and social stereotypes related to teacher's age, was supported.

Pearson's correlation test also revealed that there were significant, negative, and medium to large correlation between Boyko's empathy and social stereotypes related to teacher's profession; $r = -.46$, $p < .001$ (one-tailed). As such, hypothesis which states that there is a negative association between Boyko's empathy and social stereotypes related to teacher's profession, was supported.

[§] Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized as supplementary instruments during the data analysis phase to assist in the interpretation of results, identification of patterns, and to promote objectivity and enhance the efficiency of the analytical process. The authors retained full responsibility for all analytical interpretations

| | | Social stereotype age related | Social stereotype teacher related |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Empathy Boyko's | Pearson Correlation | -.195 | -.456 |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | .042 | .000 |
| | N | 104 | 104 |

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Empathy Boyko's questionnaire and social stereotypes

Hall's tool showed evidence that the participants had high level (67%) and medium (15%) of self-awareness and self-knowledge, high level of emotion regulation ranging high 59% of participants, 22 medium emotion regulation skills and the remaining low emotion regulation skills of 19%. Fifty six percent of the participants were highly motivated, while medium motivation and low motivation were shown 16 and 28 percent respectively. Forty three percent of females and 64% of males scored low empathy while scored overall was similar to the detailed description. An average of 53% of the general population scored low on empathy. Overall, 46% of the participants scored low on empathy, 32% medium and only 22% high. The final component was to evaluate the individual's capacity to recognize emotions in others. The results were as follows: Fifty nine percent of females and 53% of males scored low ability to recognize and read emotions in others. Fifty six percent of overall participants showed the low score in these skills and their need for improving the overall social skills.

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DISCUSSION

Results offered evidence that the teachers who scored high on social skills and empathy manifested lower levels of stereotypes. Evidence shows that teachers are self-aware and have effective skills to manage and regulate their emotions. This is in terms of personal competencies of knowing the self and regulating themselves where they can lead and motivate themselves. Self-aware and emotion regulating individuals are able to lead themselves and stay motivated to build and maintain healthy relationships with others.

Their empathy level and their ability to understand and read emotions of others is a very significant and indispensable skill. This is a huge area of concerns because teaching and learning processes have empathy and understanding the other at their core. If schools aim to improve the academic performance and offer learners the boost and head start of social skills, then teachers are the agents to make that come true. If teachers are to lead by example, then they have to possess the ability to put themselves in others' shoes and read their emotions to show empathy and kindness.

Decety, J. (2011) has offered biological evidence on what empathy does to the brain and how it minimizes the manifestations of anger when brain "connections" are made through empathy. Moreover, cognitive empathy (understanding another's perspective) and affective empathy (sharing another's emotions) each have distinct relationships with stereotypes. Cognitive empathy can either reduce stereotypes by promoting nuanced understanding or reinforce them by intellectualizing differences without emotional connection. Affective empathy can decrease stereotypes by fostering emotional bonds and individual recognition, but it can also lead to in-group favoritism, reinforcing biases against out-group members. Overall, cognitive empathy may mitigate or perpetuate stereotypes depending on the context, while affective empathy has a more direct effect, either reducing or amplifying biases based on emotional connections (Decety, 2011).

Research has consistently indicated that women generally exhibit higher levels of empathy than men, with studies suggesting that females often outperform males in tasks requiring emotional recognition and perspective-taking. (Toussaint, L., & Webb, J. R. , 2005).

The stereotypes present in classroom can increase the gap between learners and eventually marginalize minorities and disrupt the teaching learning processes. It is vital that educators and school policy makers are aware of these stereotypes and do take actions to minimize their presence, through creating equity inside classrooms and ensuring that schools are safe places for all learners.

The 104 teachers come from Armenian schools in Lebanon, which is contextually specific. However, self-reflection questionnaires can sometimes offer biased findings and we need to be careful when we come to generalize these findings to larger population. Moreover, feedback from teachers, learners and parents can also add triangulated evaluation and assessment and thus a deeper understanding.

Teachers who are already inside classrooms, will need training to implement these skills in forms of trainings, workshops, courses. As for student-teachers, these courses need to be in their teaching diploma courses, where they learn about philosophy and psychology of education and then they are equipped with lesson planning and classroom management skills to implement effective teaching that is fit for the 21st century learner.

Targeting pre service and in service teachers is an effective way to train teachers on emotional

intelligence and empathy so that they can cater to the de-motivated learners, the emotionally unbalanced youth and help the whole society heal, recover and move forward.

After the covid pandemic, teacher burnout is the major pandemic and if we are not able to cater to the mental health of educators, and offer them tools for self-care, motivation and empathy, they will not be able to survive in the challenging profession.

Kindness and empathy are the requirements for the future leaders and if we do not train our children on empathy and social skills, they will suffer making their way. As educators it is our role, to propose tools for teachers and pioneer as change catalysts and agents for growth. This project needs various components to be present:

- ✓ Teacher Personal Mental Health: Teachers who are not feeling well emotionally, physically, psychologically and socially, are not able to relate to learners and be able to show empathy and compassion to target lessons to the relevance of learners and for their benefit.

- ✓ Teaching resources and strategies: Helping teachers identify tools to effectively introduce social Emotional learning inside classrooms. Teachers need besides training, resources and materials to be able to use them effectively inside classrooms, integrated with their academic work. Ideally, teachers can do both: have unique explicit social emotional learning sessions to introduce these skills and create emotional literacy and yet they can also integrate them hand in hand with academic teaching strategies to ensure best results. The classroom climate can create the larger umbrella where thoughts, words and actions are inspired by the social emotional learning standards.

- ✓ Overall school wide policies: Teachers are the main agents to start the change and create compassionate classrooms, yet they cannot do it alone. They need school leaders who believe in social emotional learning and support this work and together create a roadmap that caters to their wellbeing as individuals and also supports and nurtures the growth of empathetic learners. These road map would differ from school to another based on their mission and vision, yet the goal and shared vision remains the same: education for hope and resilience, an education that creates self-aware empathetic learners who build and maintain relationship with their communities creating sustainable change and equity.

It is through such professional development opportunities that the effective framework would be complimented and implemented so that emotional intelligence and empathy through education can create equity in the society where self-aware and confident individuals aim to be motivated to build and maintain healthy relationships, tolerating those who are different, accepting those with special needs and creating a more inclusive and sustainable societies with lifelong learners.

Introducing SEL inside schools is a journey that only courageous educators and leaders can

start because it can transform lives and create sustainable growth within communities. It starts with preparing teachers in terms of knowledge and awareness of competencies such as self-awareness, emotion regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills so that they can cater to their own emotional intelligence and wellbeing and then move to preparing them to teach these skills inside classrooms. Daniel Goleman urges educators to plan strategically lessons and experiences that target these skills because they count 80% of life success. (Goleman, 1995).

Introducing SEL inside classroom can be done next by offering teachers resources such as activity ideas, posters, games, flashcards so that they have the right tools to work with. However, this needs to be paired with creating the safe classroom atmosphere that nurtures the choice and the voice of learners. Teachers then get equipped with teaching strategies that target learner centeredness and allow learner to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts, solve problems and work collaboratively, building all these life skills through the integrated mode of SEL with academics.

Finally, parents need to be active stakeholders and partners to work hand in hand at home, and improve the effectiveness of such programs. The monitoring and evaluation processed throughout all the phases can allow hope to be born and ensure that SEL becomes part of the national teacher certifications, essential part of teaching diploma of preparing teachers and also a highly recommended topics for in service teacher programs.

Readiness on the level of policy makers is the key when discussing the concept of Emotional intelligence and social skills. It is vital to ensure that leaders of the education systems, organizations and schools understand the long-term benefits of developing SEL programs and experience their own competencies of Emotional Intelligence in order to communicate the purpose and the importance of such programs. The leaders of the schools and national educators on the ministry level need to monitor, evaluate and offer ongoing feedback on the development of the competencies in their personal development plans as well as the impact of these programs inside schools.

In order to proceed into such programs, educational leaders need to have a clear assessment of their own strengths and limitations, so that they can improve their status, before becoming themselves change catalysts in the organizations. These leaders would emphasize self-development and development of teachers on these vital skills, offering them evidence in science, psychology and education, so teachers buy in and join the action. When organizations plan such changes inside the spirit and the culture of schools, it is crucial that communication is clear, objective, honest and scientific. (Chernis, Goleman, 2001)

Goleman insists that these skills are teachable and learnable and research shows that emotional intelligence is first in someone's genetics and then it is established at the child stage

already and in grows and increases later stages, through healthy and meaningful experiences and interaction between parent-child, child to child, child to school and child to society. Qualter and Gardner, aligned with Goleman, insist that through social and emotional learning and curricula at schools, such programs can help children boost their emotional intelligence and thus improve their self-worth and self-regard at early stages of life (Qualter and Gardner 2007).

Can personal and social competencies manifested through self-awareness and regulation on one hand and empathy, motivation and emotional coaching on the other hand be learned and acquired? If the answer to that question is yes by Mathew and Deary (2009), and Goleman (1995,1998) then the next question would be, where these skills need to be ideally taught? Mayer and Salovey (1997) declare that a valid response to this question may be schools, the best sites to introduce social skills at early ages. They explain that ideally, human beings need to be introduced to emotional intelligence as early as they start school and learn skills like any other skill through educational institutions and curricula.

More specifically, Petrides, Frederickson and Furnham (2004) studied 650 pupils in British secondary education to evaluate the potential role of emotional intelligence in academic performance and in deviant behavior at school. Their findings suggested that trait Emotional Intelligence was significantly related to scholastic achievement especially in the languages. Trait emotional intelligence was negatively associated with unauthorized absences and expulsion from school. Emotional intelligence, according to Petrides et al, is an aspect to investigate especially for vulnerable learners. (Petrides, Frederickson and Furnham 2004)

Bracket & Katulak (2006) explain that introducing any new change to school curricula ideally starts with teacher's education and then administration support and then only results may be seen on the level of learners. Teachers are advised to be trained with knowledge basis and practical tools to be able to integrate any new concept and skill to education. They both argue that before teachers enter the classroom, they need to attend proper workshops and training in order to be able to create a "safe, caring, satisfying and productive school environment". According to them, proper preparatory courses should give teachers a theoretical background as well as practical tools to implement and bring innovation to their daily classrooms.

Finally, if one is to realistically start the advocacy through preservice and Inservice teacher trainings, then comes the national framework and curricula for universities and also for schools.

CONCLUSION

This study compellingly illustrates the deep interconnection between empathy—a core component of emotional intelligence—and the reduction of social stereotypes among education

professionals. Conducted among 104 Armenian educators in Lebanon, the research clearly highlights that higher levels of empathy correlate with a lower expression of both age-related and profession-related stereotypes. The findings support the hypothesis that emotional intelligence, and specifically empathy, functions as a psychological buffer against biased cognitive structures that contribute to stereotyping.

The results revealed a concerning imbalance: while many teachers demonstrated high self-awareness and emotion regulation, the majority exhibited low levels of empathy and poor skills in recognizing others' emotions. Notably, 53% of participants scored low on empathy, and over half struggled to interpret the emotions of others—skills essential to fostering inclusive classrooms. This disparity raises critical questions about teacher preparedness and training in emotional and social competencies.

Through the use of Boyko's empathy test and original stereotype assessment tools, the study confirmed statistically significant negative correlations:

- **Empathy vs. Age-Related Stereotypes** ($r = -0.195$, $p = 0.042$)
- **Empathy vs. Profession-Related Stereotypes** ($r = -0.456$, $p < 0.001$)

These correlations affirm that educators with greater empathic capacity are less prone to stereotype their peers or students. This relationship is particularly crucial in post-conflict contexts like Lebanon, where emotional resilience and mutual understanding are foundational to healing and rebuilding trust within educational settings.

The discussion further explores the duality of cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy enables perspective-taking, whereas affective empathy fosters genuine emotional attunement. Both play pivotal yet distinct roles in disrupting stereotype formation. However, when empathy is lacking—especially affective empathy—teachers may unintentionally reinforce in-group biases, further marginalizing vulnerable students.

Crucially, this study calls for system-wide changes:

1. **Policy Integration:** Emotional intelligence and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) should be mandated within teacher preparation and certification programs.
2. **Training and Resources:** Teachers need structured, research-backed training, teaching strategies, and ready-to-use materials for embedding SEL in everyday pedagogy.
3. **Institutional Culture:** Whole-school policies must align with SEL goals, led by administrators who model emotional intelligence themselves.
4. **Community Partnership:** Parents and community stakeholders must be included in the SEL journey to reinforce empathy and inclusion both inside and outside school walls.

In sum, empathy emerges not only as a personal strength but as a transformative educational force. Its cultivation in teachers can mitigate biases, foster inclusive classrooms, and lay the groundwork for equitable education. As Goleman (1995) emphasized, emotional intelligence accounts for more than 80% of success in life—schools must rise to the challenge of nurturing it. Only then can we truly prepare students for a future grounded in tolerance, equity, and shared humanity.

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