Impact of the Student Teaching Internship on the Emotional Intelligence of Pre-Service School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers

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Everyone feels positive and negative emotions, but managing emotions matters most (Daft & Lane, 2001). A teacher's emotional intelligence has been found to have various impacts on teaching such as classroom management, burnout, resilience, school climate, and job satisfaction (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Joshi et al., 2015; Ngui & Lay, 2020; Washburn et al., 2022). It is important to have a better understanding of how teachers manage emotions that come with the stress of their job to mitigate their reasons for leaving the profession and in turn increase retention rates (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The theories of human capital and emotional intelligence were used to frame this study. Human capital represents the idea a person invests into the resources needed for the future, such as knowledge, skills, dispositions, or social resources (Becker, 1962; Smylie, 1996). In agricultural education, human capital is often viewed as teacher professional development and appears to be an important component of teacher preparation programs (Eck et al., 2020; Robinson & Baker, 2013; Spenner, 1985).

Emotional intelligence refers to a person's abilities to perceive, identify, understand, and successfully manage emotions in oneself and others. The four components of emotional intelligence include self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management (Daft & Lane, 2001). Human capital and emotional intelligence are essential to teachers because both have effects on success in the classroom (Jennings & Gerber, 2009; Robinson & Baker, 2013; Spenner, 1985).

Methodology

This study aimed to assess student teachers' emotional intelligence prior to and immediately after their student teaching experience. The population of interest was pre-service SBAE teachers in Region V of the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) who were to complete their student teaching internship during the Spring 2024 semester. The objectives for the study were identified as: (a) Determine the emotional intelligence level of pre-service teachers prior to their student teaching experience; (b) Determine their emotional intelligence just after their student teaching experience; and, (c) Compare differences in emotional intelligence before and after their student teaching experience.

A retrospective pretest-posttest design was used to investigate the objectives of this exploratory, descriptive, quantitative study. The instrument used was the Social-Emotional Competence Teacher Rating Scale (SECTRS) first developed by Tom (2012). We received 14 responses at the end of the data collection period; however, only 8 were useable due to incomplete responses, yielding a response rate of 9.75%.

The SECTRS instrument contained questions associated with four construct categories: (a) teacher-student relationships; (b) emotion regulation, (c) social awareness, and (d) interpersonal relationships. The number of questions pertaining to each category were 7, 6, 6, 6, respectively. The response choices for each question was a 6-point Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Consequently, the possible range for the construct of teacher-student relationships was 7-42 and the range for the other three constructs was 6-36. The resulting overall emotional intelligence score had a range of 25-150.

Findings

Prior to the student teaching experience, the overall emotional intelligence levels of respondents ranged from 90-131 and the mean was 115.13 (*SD* = 21.2). The construct with the highest mean prior to student teaching was social awareness (34.63). The construct with the lowest mean before student teaching was emotion-regulation (24.25).

After the student teaching experience, the overall emotional intelligence levels of respondents ranged from 91-136 and the mean was 117.01 (*SD* = 15.0). The construct with the highest mean after student teaching was student-teacher relationships (32.63) and the construct with the lowest mean after student teaching was emotion regulation (24.13).

When comparing means for the teacher-student relationship construct before and after student teaching, the paired samples *t*-test yielded a test statistic of –1.768, a *p*-value of 0.120, and a Cohen's *d* effect size value of -0.625. The comparison of means for emotional regulation had a test statistic of 0.357, a *p*-value of 0.732, and a Cohen's *d* effect size value of 0.126. When comparing means for the social awareness component, the test statistic was 3.960, the *p*-value was 0.005, and the Cohen's *d* effect size was 1.400. The last component compared was interpersonal relationships. The resulting values were –1.572 for the test statistic, 0.160 for the *p*-value, and -0.556 for the Cohen's *d* effect size.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the results of this study:

- This group of preservice teachers enter student teaching with the ability to recognize and understand other people's emotions.
- This group of preservice teachers enter and complete student teaching with a low ability being to regulate their emotions.
- At the conclusion of student teaching, this group of preservice teachers have the ability to create healthy teacher-student relationships.
- The student teaching experience does not influence this group of preservice teachers' abilities to form teacher-student connections, manage their emotions, or improve interpersonal relationships.
- The emotional intelligence for this group is positively impacted by the teaching experience.
- This group of preservice teachers recognize their ability to understand the social dynamics in their classroom is less developed than initially believed and they recognize their ability to regulate their own emotions is less developed than they initially perceived.

Implications

Are current teacher preparation programs effectively meeting the needs and supporting the emotional intelligence of preservice teachers? This potential shortcoming indicates an urgent need for curricular revisions within these programs to better align training with the practical demands of teaching.

Recommendations

Teacher preparation programs and stakeholders should continue to revise curriculum to integrate professional development on emotional intelligence concepts like emotion regulation and create specific lessons designed to introduce reflection practices that could be implemented throughout the program. These programs can foster a climate encouraging emotional intelligence and creating social communities. Preservice teachers should remain focused on fostering positive teacher-student relationships to assist with classroom management while providing an opportunity to refine interpersonal skills.

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