

What is this feeling? Exploration of emotional intelligence in California SBAE

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Introduction

Within school-based agricultural education (SBAE), teacher responsibilities extend far beyond the classroom and school year, as teachers serve as FFA advisors and project managers (Roberts et al., 2020). These demands contribute to stress, burnout, and turnover, making exploring strategies for long-term career sustainability essential. Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as a capacity for recognizing one's feelings, and the feelings of others, while negotiating emotions and relationships (Goleman, 2005), plays a key role in managing workplace challenges, fostering resilience, increasing well-being, and reducing stress (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003). However, the documented use of EI as a professional learning tool in SBAE and the research on it is scarce. Akers et al. (2004) identified eight EI competencies needed for successful SBAE teachers, and Su et al. (2022) suggested general education teachers recognize the importance of EI but may lack a complete understanding of its role in their profession. Given the demands of SBAE teachers, the notion that professional learning prepares SBAE teachers to handle demands (Traini et al., 2021), and EI's role in mitigating workplace challenges (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), this research was conducted, as a part of a larger study, to address the following objective: Describe EI in early career SBAE teachers in California as measured by the EQ-I 2.0™.

Conceptual Framework

The Diamond Model of Leadership (Lattore, 2021) framed this study. A visual depiction of the model will be provided with the final poster. Individuals use feedback and reflection to develop skills and self-confidence as they move from their current reality to the future. The model guides the leadership development of agriculturists in California (Lattore, 2021) thus was deemed an appropriate model to frame the development of SBAE teachers who prepare students for the agricultural workforce. In the context of SBAE, a part of early career teachers' current reality can be described via the exploration of their EQ-I 2.0™ results and their current emotional intelligence levels. The model suggests that the coupling of feedback and reflection may aid in providing clarity for skill and confidence development for SBAE teachers as they move toward their future reality within the profession.

Methodology

In this quantitative descriptive study, participants were invited via email as early career SBAE teachers (years one through three) in California. Participants ($n = 13$) were administered the EQ-I 2.0™, where 11 participants completed the instrument. The EQ-I 2.0™ uses 133 items to measure the 5 composites, and their subscales, of self-perception (self-regard, self-actualization, and emotional self-awareness), self-expression (emotional expression, assertiveness, and independence), interpersonal (interpersonal relationships, empathy, and social responsibility), decision-making (problem-solving, reality testing, and impulse control), and stress management (flexibility, stress tolerance, and optimism). An overall well-being indicator is also provided as a composite of self-regard, optimism, interpersonal relationships, and self-actualization. The instrument has been used for 20 years and is noted as one of the most accurate measurement tools for emotional intelligence (Multi Health Systems (MHS), 2023). Instrument reliability is strong, and the internal consistency of the total emotional intelligence instrument is more than acceptable with $\alpha = .97$ (MHS, 2024). The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) research was used to generate descriptive statistics for analysis.

Results and Findings

The interpersonal dimension was rated highest, followed by self-perception, stress management, decision-making, and self-expression (Table 1). Well-being was $M = 98.00$ ($SD = 14.20$). Subscale items will be included with the final poster presentation.

Table 1

Description of EQ-I 2.0™ Composite Scale Items in California Early Career SBAE Teachers (n = 13)

Composite Scale Items	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Interpersonal	87.00	117.00	104.07	11.49
Self-Perception	79.00	118.00	102.23	12.07
Stress Management	81.00	131.00	99.84	13.52
Decision-Making	79.00	121.00	98.00	13.61
Self-Expression	83.00	109.00	95.07	8.49

Conclusions

Scores between 90 and 110 represented 50% of the general population on the EQ-I 2.0™ (MHS, 2024), and early-career SBAE teachers from California averaged in this range of standardized scores on all composites. They were above average ($M > 100$) for interpersonal relationships and self-perception and below average ($M < 100$) in stress management, decision-making, well-being, and self-expression. Participants can be described as having above-average interpersonal relationships and self-perception, engaging in mutually satisfying relationships, appreciating how others feel, being socially conscious, respecting themselves, pursuing self-improvement, and understanding their own emotions. Conversely, they can be described as less able to manage stress, make decisions, practice well-being, and express themselves.

Implications/Recommendations

This research provided insight into the individual EI characteristics of early career SBAE teachers in California. The teachers in this study fall within the average range (90-110) (MHS, 2024), suggesting it is equally important to focus on EI in SBAE teachers as in other professions. Using EI as a potential development tool may help inform SBAE teachers as they progress in their careers from their current reality to their future reality (Lattore, 2021) within the profession, and may influence their career longevity. Future research should include following up with participants to collect qualitative data via interviews to better understand how they have used EI in their classrooms and its potential impact on students. Lattore's (2021) model suggests there are personal contexts (i.e., spirituality, character, community, and organization) for leadership development in agriculture. Learning more about how these contexts influence SBAE teachers may also be of interest to researchers.

Recommendations for practitioners include the implementation of EI-focused pre-service and in-service teacher training, aligning with the recommendations of Akers et al. (2004). In planning these types of learning sessions, practitioners should pay special attention to the lowest-ranking subscales of EI, particularly stress management, self-expression, and decision-making as they appear to be spaces where improvement may be the most beneficial. Following Lattore's (2021) model for leadership development in agriculture, items contributing to overall EI, whether expressed as strengths or areas for growth, can only be resolved via reflection and the overcoming of fears. Scaffolding regular reflective practices may be of importance when helping early career SBAE teachers manage the demands of their work.

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