

**Exploring the Relationship Between Pre-Service Teachers Emotional Intelligence and Their
Development of Effective Teaching Characteristics**

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Introduction

School-based agricultural education (SBAE) asks teachers to carry out a wide range of responsibilities including classroom instruction, SAE supervision, FFA advising, and professional engagement (Best, 2023). Evaluating teacher effectiveness is difficult due to these varied expectations (Eck et al., 2019). Effective teachers are described as knowledgeable in their content area, credentialed, and demonstrating characteristics such as clarity, enthusiasm, leadership, and communication (Rosenshine & Furst, 1971). Eck et al. (2019) identified six key areas to account for when evaluating SBAE teacher effectiveness: intracurricular engagement, personal dispositions, appreciation for diversity and inclusion, pedagogical preparedness, work life balance, and professionalism. Emotional intelligence (EI) also plays a key role, influencing teacher performance, attitudes, and school climate (Jennings & Gerber, 2009).

Emotional intelligence, EI, is a vital indicator of teacher performance and dispositions (Sekreter, 2019). Teachers with higher EI are shown to be more effective and those with lower EI tend to show more negative attitudes impacting their ability to be effective (Jennings & Gerber, 2009). With rising teacher demand and limited supply, agricultural education programs must ensure pre-service teachers are well prepared (Sutcher et al., 2016). Pre-service teachers enter teacher preparation programs with varying human capital (i.e., background, skills, and experiences; Eck et al., 2019). Few studies connect SBAE pre-service teachers' emotional intelligence with their ability to develop effective teaching behaviors prior to student teaching. The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and the development of effective teaching behaviors of pre-service teachers prior to student teaching.

Theoretical Framework

Human capital refers to the education, skills, dispositions, and resources a person gains through activities that influence their present and future well-being (Becker, 1962). In agricultural education, teacher professional development is a key part of building human capital and preparing effective SBAE teachers (Eck et al., 2020). Because traditionally certified teachers build much of this capital during student teaching, this study examined pre-service teachers perceived needs prior to student teaching.

Methods

As a required component of the Agricultural Education Teacher Preparation Program at Oklahoma State University, students enroll in an Inquiry-Based Instruction in Agricultural Education course. The course uses the CASE AFNR curriculum as the foundation for exploring curriculum and developing effective teaching principles. Because this course is taken the semester prior to student teaching, students enrolled were selected as the study sample due to accessibility and relevance. This non-experimental, survey research design used the ETI-SBAE instrument (Eck et al., 2020) alongside the SECTRS instrument (Tom, 2012), both previously tested for validity and reliability.

Data were collected from preservice SBAE teachers (N = 21) enrolled in the course during Fall 2025, with 19 completing the instrument (90.0% response rate). The online Qualtrics

survey included all ETI-SBAE and SECTRS items, plus one question regarding participants' intention to enter the SBAE teaching profession. After collection, data were imported into Excel for composite scoring and then analyzed in SPSS Version 29 using descriptive statistics and a Pearson correlation to determine relationship between emotional intelligence and effective teaching characteristics.

Findings

The responses to the 51 survey questionnaire items were analyzed by determining composite scores for the ETI and SECTRS instrument. The 26-item ETI-SBAE instrument with equal weighting across items, composite scores could range from a low of 26 (very weak) to a high of 104 (very strong), with actual participant mean of 98.11 (SD = 5.68). Composite scores for the 25-item SECTRS emotional intelligence instrument had a possible range of 25 to 150, with an actual participant mean of 116.90 (SD = 7.20). The composite scores were then compared to determine if a relationship existed between effective teaching characteristics and emotional intelligence. A Pearson correlation provided an output value of 0.689 with a significance of $p = 0.001$.

Conclusions

Pre-service SBAE teachers' emotional intelligence and their perceived ability to develop effective teaching characteristics are related. Sekreter (2019) describes emotional intelligence as being vital to teacher performance. A teacher with high emotional intelligence can positively impact school climate and communication skills between people (Jennings & Gerber, 2009). Furthermore, they are shown to be more effective, whereas teachers with lower emotional intelligence tend to have more negative attitudes (Jennings & Gerber, 2009). If EI is related to pre-service teachers' ability to develop effective teaching characteristics, then teacher preparation programs should treat EI as a crucial part of the program.

Students report a sense of self-efficacy related to EI. A person with higher EI will likely have increased performance and a higher ability to communicate because they are better at perceiving emotions, solving emotion-related issues, and have social skills leading to positive social interactions (Mayer et al., 2004). Perhaps this is not a true representation of pre-service teachers' EI and is over-inflated due to students not truly knowing what it is like teaching in a classroom full-time, as the student teaching internship is often their first prolonged classroom experience (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). Similarly, students reported a high sense of effectiveness. An effective teacher is described as knowledgeable in their content area, credentialed, and demonstrating characteristics such as clarity, enthusiasm, leadership, and communication (Rosenshine & Furst, 1971).

Teacher preparation programs and stakeholders should continue to value and be aware of pre-service teachers' emotional well-being encouraging reflective strategies. This study should be replicated in different states to determine if results vary. Future research should expand upon this study to determine which component of EI matters most to pre-service teachers. A study should also investigate differences across program types and pathways to certification within service teachers.

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