



Examining the Interplay of Teacher Emotional Intelligence and Feedback Responsiveness in Post-observation Conferences: Voices from Iran

Jaber Kamali¹ · Pourya Javahery²

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Abstract

This study attempted to investigate the impact of teachers' Emotional Intelligence (EI) on how they respond to post-observation feedback. To do so, 11 Iranian EFL teachers were selected and divided into two groups of high and low EI based on their EI test results. Based on their observed classes, post-observation conferences were held between the teacher and the observer. A thorough thematic analysis of the data unveiled three predominant themes: (1) maintaining positive moods and coping with stressful situations, (2) accepting negative feedback and justifying one's performance, and (3) accepting negative feedback and becoming defensive. The findings of the study suggested that there were obvious differences in the way the teachers reacted to feedback from their observers. High EI teachers remained more confident after the negative feedback, were willing to listen to the observer, were active listeners, were open to criticism, and reflected on their performance. Low EI teachers, however, became agitated, failed to control their stress, tried to justify their performance, did not tend to accept the negative feedback, became defensive, responded immediately, and used discourse boosters frequently after the negative feedback. The study urges updated teacher education programs informed by teachers' EI, particularly in providing feedback on their performance.

Keywords Teacher education · Teacher professional development · Emotional intelligence · Post-observation conference · Feedback · Thematic analysis

✉ Jaber Kamali
jaber.kamali@ihu.edu.tr

Pourya Javahery
pouryajavahery@gmail.com

¹ School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University, Istanbul, Turkey

² Faculty of Foreign Languages, Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence (EI) and their reaction to different stimuli; however, observers' feedback did not receive the attention it deserves. Teacher EI can be defined as the ability to recognize and handle one's own emotions and those of the students. It is a collective of skills, developed over time that allows one to make well-informed decisions and behave in ways that positively affect their interactions with students (Maamari & Majdalani, 2019). These skills include self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Understanding and improving teacher EI can lead to better classroom management, improved student outcome, and enhanced teacher well-being. Moreover, teachers could be equipped with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of teaching and classroom environment if EI training is integrated into professional development programs.

EI has been investigated from four different perspectives hitherto, namely survival, resiliency, motivation, and connectedness. Survival EI focuses on the ability of a teacher to remain calm in difficult situations and to advocate for themselves (Lin et al., 2012). Resiliency EI involves a teacher's ability to recover from setbacks and to utilize knowledge to resolve difficult situations (Droppert et al., 2019). Motivation EI relates to a teacher's passion for their work and their ability to maintain enthusiasm when teaching (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018). Finally, connectedness EI refers to a teacher's ability to build meaningful relationships with their students in order to support their learning (Turki et al., 2018). Recognizing these diverse dimensions of EI draws attention to the multilayered nature of EI in the educational context. Furthermore, integrating these perspectives into teacher training programs can help teachers improve their overall effectiveness.

There has also been some focus on whether or not teachers' EI possibly can affect the way they provide the students with feedback and/or corrective feedback (Vahedi et al., 2018). Provided that teachers' EI can have a direct effect on the quality of their feedback, being aware of this factor can help the institutions improve the quality of their professional development programs, which consequently leads to improvement of teaching quality because EI is considered a competence which can be learned and developed (Mayer et al., 2016). Teachers, therefore, can enhance their ability to deliver feedback in a more supportive and effective manner if EI is considered in teacher professional development programs. Consequently, they can foster learning outcomes and student engagement.

Despite the extensive research on teachers' EI and its impact on various aspects of teaching, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how teachers with different EI levels react to their environment, particularly in the context of post-observation conferences. Post-observation conferences are typically meetings between observers with teachers after observing their classes to provide feedback on their classes (Waring, 2017) which are considered critical in teachers' professional development (Zhuo, 2024). These meetings were popular after the advent of "reflective models of supervision" (Vásquez & Reppen, 2007), where "the emphasis has shifted away from a teaching observation – and the teacher/mentor meeting which typically follows this observation – as a primarily evaluative event, to an activity intended to promote teachers' reflective practice" (Vásquez & Reppen, 2007). These meetings were the focus of a line of research regarding their discourse (Zhuo, 2024), or their participants' characteristics impact on its quality (Javahery & Kamali, 2023). On the other hand, most studies on EI have focused on its general benefits in teaching, such as

improved classroom management, enhanced student-teacher relationships, and better handling of stress (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020; Kokkinos, 2007; Ramesar et al., 2009). Therefore, there is limited research on how EI influences teachers' responses to feedback (e.g. Molloy et al., 2013). This scarcity is even more evident in the context of post-observation feedback. This gap is particularly noticeable in the Iranian context, where the role of EI in teacher training and professional development has not been thoroughly investigated (Majidinia, 2018). The unique cultural and educational dynamics in Iran necessitate a closer examination of how EI affects teacher behavior and professional growth in this specific setting. By focusing on this under-researched area, this study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature and provide a deeper understanding of the influence of EI on teachers' reactions to feedback in post-observation conferences. This research is significant as it will shed light on the intersection of EI and feedback processes, which is crucial for enhancing teacher training programs and improving teaching practices in Iran.

Literature Review

Definition and Importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

EI is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and regulate one's own feelings and the feelings of others (Colman, 2008). The concept of EI has gained significant attention in academic literature over the past few decades due to its potential impact on personal and professional success (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). EI has been linked to a range of effects, namely improved interpersonal relationships (Parker et al., 2021), developed decision-making skills (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2011), and increased job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2017). Researchers have also found that individuals with high levels of EI are better prepared to handle stress, manage conflicts, and adapt to change (Başoğul & Özgür, 2016; Morrison, 2008; Parmentier et al., 2019). As such, understanding and developing EI have become critical components of personal and professional growth. EI was popularized by Goleman (1995) and the studies on EI have reported numerous findings in different education fields including, inter alia, Caruso et al. (2014), explored the impact of EI on leadership effectiveness. They found that leaders who possess high EI are better equipped to manage teams, navigate conflicts, and inspire others. Schutte et al. (1998) and Zeidner et al. (2012) also investigated how EI contributes to academic success. Their findings suggest that students with higher EI levels tend to have better academic performance. Some years later Schutte et al. (2002) evaluated EI levels on students' well-being concluding that higher levels of emotional intelligence were significantly associated with better psychological well-being among students. Austin et al. (2010) focused on how EI helps individuals cope with exam-related stress. They found that students with higher EI are more resilient in handling the pressures of exams and Christie et al. (2007) studied the relationship between EI and motivation. They observed that individuals with higher EI are more self-aware and better at setting achievable goals. Each of these studies contributes to our understanding of how EI impacts different aspects of life, from academic success and stress management to leadership effectiveness and motivation. Integrating EI into educational and organizational settings can lead to improved outcomes and enhanced

interpersonal relationships. Consequently, this study aims to investigate that how teachers' EI influence their responsiveness to feedback provided by observers.

Subsequent research has identified EI as a key predictor of leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. For instance, Cheong et al. (2019) conducted a review of the literature on EI and transformational leadership and found that individuals with high levels of EI were more likely to exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, which in turn had positive effects on team outcomes. In a recent study, Yüce et al. (2024) found out that negative emotions can negatively impact teachers' performance and even their future envisions. These findings highlight the importance of understanding and developing EI as a critical constituent of personal and professional growth.

Teachers' EI, in addition, gained momentum in the literature and scholars are abundant on the topic. Literature on teachers' EI has been filled by its impact on different aspects of teachers' personal, psychological, and social lives. There are a number of studies on developing this concept (Tuyakova et al., 2023), training teachers about it (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014), and its impact on various social and psychological factors such as burn-out, well-being, social competencies, and job satisfaction (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017; Skura & Świdarska, 2022). Despite this extensive body of work, there remains a critical gap in understanding how teachers with different levels of EI respond to feedback in post-observation conferences.

In a longitudinal study, Dolev and Leshem (2016) aimed to examine the effectiveness of a training program designed to develop EI competence among teachers. They reported the qualitative findings of a comprehensive research project that investigated the impact of a two-year EI development program on teachers. The study involved 26 teachers who participated in the program and were interviewed to explore its effects on them. The results indicated that EI could be improved in teachers, and the training program was effective in bringing about positive changes in their EI and related behaviors. In another study, Valente et al. (2019) explored the impact of teachers' EI on classroom discipline management, as well as the relationship between EI and teachers' gender, academic background, and years of service. The results suggested that EI training should be considered an essential component of teacher professional development programs to promote effective classroom management and improve teacher-student relationships. In a very recent study, Nwosu et al. (2023) investigated the effect of EI on teachers' attitudes, apprehensions, and feelings towards inclusive education, while taking into account career factors. After accounting for professional-related factors, the study's findings revealed a significant correlation between teacher EI and their attitudes and concerns regarding inclusive education. However, no significant relationship was found between EI and teachers' sentiments, and professional-related factors could not explain individual differences in teachers' sentiments. This study seeks to provide deeper insights into the practical applications of EI in educational settings. Such research is essential for understanding the relationship between teachers' level of EI and their responsiveness in pos-observation conferences.

Teachers with high EI skills are able to create an emotionally supportive classroom in which they can teach more effectively. Brackett et al. (2011) studied the role of teachers' EI in creating a supportive and positive atmosphere in classroom which leads to the promotion of teaching effectiveness. In addition to teachers' EI, students' EI skills would play a major role in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. This suggestion is well in line with the works Alavinia and Mollahosseini (2012) and Aliasin and Abbasi (2020). These studies

explored the relationship between EI and the use of metacognitive strategies by EFL learners. The results indicated that the levels of EI can directly affect the use of metacognitive skills. Recent studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between students' EI and their motivation and achievement motivation (Mahyuddin et al., 2009; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2017; (Chang & Tsai, 2022). These findings collectively highlight the significant impact of both teachers' and students' emotional intelligence on educational outcomes and they emphasize the importance of fostering EI in educational settings to enhance both teaching effectiveness and student learning.

Teacher Observation and Feedback

Studies on teacher education suggest that teachers (and even teacher educators) can benefit from continuous constructive observations and reflections from others and themselves (Anast-May et al., 2011; Baecher & McCormack, 2015; Bailey, 2006; Kamali, 2023, 2024). Observation, as a necessary part of teacher supervision, has a rich literature that encompasses different issues. Some studies tried to develop an instrument for observation and some attempted to employ them in different contexts. Muijs et al. (2018), for instance, employed the International System for Teacher Observation and Feedback (ISTOF) as a unique instrument developed by an international team employing an iterative Delphi process to safeguard intercultural relevance and validity. The findings indicated that ISTOF can provide a highly detailed and nuanced understanding of individual lessons, but its generic approach may limit its effectiveness in terms of content richness. Further research could explore adaptations of ISTOF to enhance its applicability across diverse educational settings, potentially integrating context-specific elements to deepen its analytical depth and practical utility.

However, providing feedback on the teaching performance of the teachers is yet an almost overlooked field in the teacher education literature. Scheeler et al. (2004) in a review paper conducted a systematic search of empirical literature to identify the attributes of effective feedback. The analysis of ten studies revealed that the attributes of feedback fall into three categories including the nature of the feedback, the timing of the feedback, and the source of the feedback. This review classified feedback attributes as either promising or effective in changing specific teaching behaviors. The study concluded that among the feedback attributes, only immediate feedback was found to be effective, while promising practices included feedback that was specific, positive, and/or corrective. This suggests a need for more research and emphasis on developing feedback mechanisms that are timely, specific, and supportive that consequently enhance their impact on teacher development and instructional quality.

Overall, reviewing the literature has shown that there might exist a relationship between teachers' EI and their attitude toward feedback in teacher-observer feedback sessions. The literature on teachers' EI (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) has identified its impact on different aspects of teachers' personal, psychological, and social lives. EI training should be considered an essential component of teacher professional development programs to promote effective classroom management and improve teacher-student relationships. Similarly, developing EI can improve teachers' sense of meaning in their work and positively impact their relationships with students and teaching practice.

Teacher observation has long been recognized as a critical component in the professional development of teachers. Effective teacher observation not only provides valuable insights into teaching practices but also fosters an environment of continuous improvement and collaboration (Danielson, 2011). An essential factor in the observation process is the acceptance and responsiveness of teachers to the feedback provided by the observer. If the feedback is delivered constructively, it can significantly improve teaching practices which ultimately leads to better student outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

EI plays a pivotal role in the context of observation and feedback. EI, which is defined as the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and to recognize and influence the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995), is necessary in education because teachers with high EI are usually better equipped to handle the emotional challenges in the classrooms, build positive relationship with students, and create a supportive learning environment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Research Gap and Study Aim

In teacher education, EI is particularly important since it affects how teachers perceive and respond to feedback from observers. The responsiveness of a teacher to observer is key in our study. It is important to discuss how EI impacts this responsiveness. Teachers with higher levels of EI are more likely to view feedback as a constructive tool for growth rather than a criticism (Brackett et al., 2011). They implied that teachers with higher level of EI are more open to make changes based on the observer's feedback. This receptiveness is crucial for the feedback to be effective and for the professional development process to be successful. Hence, EI is a crucial construct that should be given attention in teacher education programs, and teacher-observer feedback sessions should take into account the EI of teachers to provide effective feedback.

This study tries to fill this gap and find the potential relationship between teachers' EI and the way they respond to feedback. The research question is proposed as follows:

- How does teachers' EI influence their responsiveness to feedback provided by observers?

Method

Design and Participants

The methodology employed in this study was qualitative, utilizing purposive sampling to select participants. In effect, the study employed a phenomenological design to explore the impact of teachers' EI on their responses to post-observation feedback. It aims to understand and describe the lived experiences and subjective perceptions of individuals (Aagaard, 2018). This approach highlights the relationship between researchers and participants, where researchers rely on participants' interpretations to make sense of the world around them (Smith et al., 2009). In the present study, by focusing on the teachers' personal experiences and emotional reactions during feedback sessions, the researchers sought to capture the

essence of how EI influences the participants' behavior and attitudes. The observations of teachers' reactions to feedback revealed complex emotional and cognitive processes that we aimed to explore thoroughly. Moreover, phenomenology was chosen as our research design to explore the researchers' subjective experiences of giving post-observation feedback. By closely examining the individual cases and employing thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes within the data, the study provided detailed insights into the differing behaviors and reactions of high and low EI teachers.

This study was conducted in Iran where private language institutions have increased in the past decades to compensate for the lack of success in developing communication competency in Iranian students in state schools (Razavipour & Firoozi, 2021). As a result of the increased reliance on private language institutions to compensate for the shortcomings in communication competency development within state schools, supervisors have been tasked with a greater responsibility. They are required to guarantee teaching quality by training, observing, and preparing language teachers. However, most of the supervisors working in private Iranian language schools are experienced and qualified teachers who have been promoted to this position but have not been trained to become educational supervisors. A case in point is supervisory discourse and providing feedback in post-observation conferences which are among the required skills of a supervisor because they are considered one of the trickiest parts of this job (Bailey, 2006).

This study was conducted in a private language institute in Iran. The participants of this study were 11 Iranian EFL teachers (4 male and 7 female). Their age ranged from 22 to 29 with teaching experience of 3 to 7 years. Eight of them had an educational profile of BA in TEFL and English Language and Literature and the rest of them were BA students of TEFL and English Translation Studies. They were teaching at elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate levels of proficiency in a language school in Iran, where the present study was conducted (Table 1).

Teaching at different levels and having different years of teaching experience were the criteria that we set to choose the participants since it could help us ensure a diverse range of insights. This diversity could enrich the study by providing a broader understanding of the educational landscape because teachers from various levels and with different lengths of experience may face unique challenges and act distinctively. Therefore, 16 teachers were nominated to participate in our study. Then, the nominated teachers were consulted to seek their approval for participation and 11 of them volunteered to take part in this study. Before

Table 1 Teachers' background information

Teacher	Gender & age	Education	Years of teaching	Observed level	EI test result	Students' age
1	Female 23	BA TEFL	3	PI	146	15–17
2	Male 24	BA TEFL	1	Elementary	116	13–15
3	Male 21	BA Translation	2	Elementary	143	13–16
4	Female 22	BA Translation	4	Intermediate	151	18–23
5	Female 28	BA Eng. Literature	6	Elementary	122	13–15
6	Female 20	BA TEFL	1	Elementary	145	11–13
7	Female 30	BA Eng. Literature	5	Beginner	117	10–12
9	Female 31	BA Eng. Literature	5	PI	121	14–16
10	Male 25	BA TEFL	3	Intermediate	146	14–17
11	Male 23	BA TEFL	2	Intermediate	147	14–17

beginning the study, the teachers expressed their utmost eagerness to be a part of this study and they were asked to sign a consent form.

In order to adhere to ethical guidelines, all 11 teachers provided their consent to partake in the study after being informed of the research's advantages and their right to withdraw at any point. We emphasize that participation was completely voluntary and uncompensated. Their willingness to participate without compensation reflects their commitment to advancing educational research and practices. To ensure confidentiality, participant identities and recorded conferences data remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms in the research report. Furthermore, the language school's administrators were informed of the study's objectives and procedures and granted permission for the research to take place.

Data Collection

The participants' EI were collected by asking them to take The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) and after that send their EI results to us. SSEIT has been extensively employed in EI studies because it has demonstrated consistent reliability and validity across various cultural contexts. Furthermore, the test's 33 items cover a broad range of emotional competencies. In light of these considerations, SSEIT was chosen for our study due to its comprehensive nature and sustainability for assessing EI of our participants. This self-report scale which consists of 33 items and is based on Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree) was developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and is used to evaluate how much respondents understand, recognize, and control emotions in themselves and others (Schutte et al., 2002). To calculate the final score, we need to invert the values of the items 5, 28, and 33. Finally, all values of the responses must be summed.

To measure general EI, SSEIT employs four subscales: Emotion Perception (e.g. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them), Utilization of Emotion (e.g. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me), Managing Self-Relevant Emotions (e.g. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on), and Managing Others' Emotions (e.g. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I have experienced this event myself). According to Schutte et al. (1998), the internal consistency was reported as 0.87 to 0.90 and a two-week test-retest reliability was 0.78. "Evidence of validity includes correlations with measures of attention to feelings, clarity of feelings, mood repair, optimism, impulse control, lack of depressed affect" (Schutte et al., 2002). Based on their test results, participants were divided into two groups (A and B) as follows:

- Group A (low and average EI): participants with EI between 116 and 122.
- Group B (average and high EI): participants with EI between 143 and 151.

Next, the participants were observed once by the second researcher (the institute's educational supervisor) and each observation lasted between 45 and 60 min. The observations were documented by the supervisor who employed a combination of audio recording and note-taking to ensure a comprehensive capture of the classroom dynamics. This dual approach allowed for a richer analysis of the teaching practices observed. After the observations, the teachers were asked to participate in a post-observation conference to receive feedback. Each post-observation conference was audio recorded.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, they were analyzed based on the guidelines of inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach means the themes are extracted from the data themselves. In other words, inductive analysis is “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis guidelines consist of six phases: “(1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report” (p. 87).

The data from the audio recorded post-observation conferences were transcribed and the initial codes were written down. After reading and re-reading the whole data, they were translated into English. The decision to conduct the conferences in teachers’ L1 was made to facilitate a more comfortable and open dialogue. Furthermore, this decision helped the teachers and supervisor communicate and understand the feedback more effectively. The initial codes were generated, and the themes were color coded. This assisted us recognize the codes which were related to the effect of participants’ EI on their behavior in the post-observation conferences. For example, when a participant became agitated after receiving negative feedback and they started to talk to the observer with a higher than usual voice tone, this was colored green and coded as “maintaining positive mood and coping with stressful situation” in which the participants with higher EI were able to control and regulate their negative emotions, whereas the participants with lower EI failed to regulate their emotions and reacted to the supervisor’s negative feedback immediately. The second group of codes ‘negative feedback and justification’ were generated when the participants with lower EI tended to justify their decisions and performances constantly to avoid accepting the negative feedback. However, the participants with higher EI were more open to accept the negative feedback and criticism. Finally, the third group of codes ‘receiving negative feedback and becoming defensive’ were noted when the researchers noticed that receiving negative feedback and criticism is not pleasant to some of the participants. Therefore, they became defensive, emotionally reactive and resisted to accept the criticism in the post-observation conference.

Consequently, the codes were collated into potential themes and a unique Microsoft Word file for each potential theme was specified. The themes were defined and named and finally three major themes emerged from the analyzed data:

1. Maintaining positive mood and coping with stressful situation.
2. Accepting negative feedback or justifying one’s performance.
3. Accepting negative feedback or becoming defensive.

These three collated themes allowed us to analyze different patterns of experiences and coping strategies. This thematic grouping was intended to enrich the phenomenological analysis by revealing diverse facets of how feedback is experienced and interpreted. The grouping facilitated a deeper exploration of individual experiences within the phenomenological framework. By examining different response patterns, we could better understand the essence of teachers’ lived experiences and how they vary across different contexts.

To ensure the dependability and credibility of the findings, several strategies were employed. For dependability, the code-recoding process was used (Anney, 2014), where the same set of data was coded more than once by the researcher at different times to verify the stability of the coding scheme over time and conditions. For credibility, triangulation was implemented by using multiple sources and methods, including classroom observation notes and post-observation conferences transcriptions, to cross-verify the findings and ensure their accuracy and robustness. Additionally, member checking (Motulsky, 2021) was conducted by providing participants with a summary of the findings to verify the accuracy of the interpretations and to provide feedback. These strategies collectively ensured that the study's findings are dependable, credible, and rigorously derived from the data.

Findings

The findings of this study suggested three themes emerged from the data dealing with how the participating teachers from two groups reacted to the observer's comments in the post-observation feedback sessions.

Maintaining a Positive Mood and Coping with Stressful Situations

Group A teachers displayed similar behaviors in the post-observation conferences regarding the relationship between EI and positive mood. After receiving negative feedback, they failed to control their stress, they became irritable and the teacher (T2) lost his temper in one case.

Extract 1 shows a post-observation conference in which T5 becomes agitated and nervous despite receiving moderate negative feedback from the observer:

Extract 1:

1. Observer: If you could add one thing to your observed lesson, what would it be?
2. T5: Umm. Let me think. So...I think everything was good. I did my best.
3. Observer: Of course, I appreciate your effort. However, the objective of your lesson was to enable the students to personalize the target language which is possible through an activation task. Agree?
4. T5 (She starts shaking her leg and touching her right ear): is it really necessary? Should I do the activation part every single session?
5. Observer: If it is necessary, the answer is yes.
6. T5 (Keeps shaking her leg and touching her face): but I have three lessons in a day and I can't get fully prepared for all of them. I don't know what to do. I really don't know how to manage all of them.
7. Observer: I'll help you with them. Don't worry.

Although T5 had a smile on her face at the beginning of the post-observation conference and also after being praised for the parts in which she had performed well, she looked quite irritated and worried after receiving the first negative feedback. She was not able to reflect on her performance anymore because she was quite upset about being criticized. A decrease in

her positive mood was visible and this made it more difficult for the observer to deliver more negative feedback. According to Woods and Miltenberger (1996), repetitive movements and face manipulation are indicators of anxiety, which T5 exhibited in response to feedback.

As it was mentioned above, T2 was not able to control his stress after the first negative feedback and became quite angry and stressed. When he was praised for his error management techniques, he was wearing a smile. Whereas, it was the first negative feedback that made him tense. Therefore, he started fidgeting, he began to tap his pen on the desk and he was constantly crossing and uncrossing his legs.

Extract 2:

8. Observer: I have a question for you. Do you think it was necessary to explain the meaning of the new words in Farsi?
9. T2 (He starts tapping his pen on the desk and a few moments after that he begins to cross his legs constantly): The problem is...No matter how many times I give them the English definition, they stare at me and wait for me to provide them with Farsi equivalent.
10. Observer: Do you always explain the English definition of the new words? Are you aware of your students' level of proficiency? They're a group of elementary students. How about pictures? Have ever tried to present the new vocabulary through pictures or flashcards?
11. T2 (Keeps tapping his pen on the desk and crossing his legs): Yes, I have. But you know...I have to take my laptop with me all the time. It's not possible. Does the institute expect me to carry my laptop all the time?
12. Observer: All the classrooms are equipped with TV. You can use them. Besides, if you need a laptop, you can use mine.
13. T2 (Puts the pen down and is folding and unfolding his arms): I don't know. Ok, thanks.

According to Woods and Miltenberger (1996), repetitive movement of the limbs and face manipulation increases during the anxiety condition. These signs of anxiety revealed in T2 when the observer delivered the very first negative feedback.

However, Group B teachers showed that they were more capable of maintaining their positive mood and controlling their stress. Extract 2 represents an episode of a post-observation conference in which the observer is criticizing a teacher (T6) for not being fully planned and prepared for her lesson. Although the teacher is under the pressure of strong criticism, she accepts the negative feedback and apologizes for her shortcomings and promises to compensate them:

Extract 3:

14. Observer: Although you were supposed to teach some new vocabulary and a new grammatical point, you didn't prepare any relevant material and I noticed that you didn't have enough mastery over the subject matter. What do you think about it?
15. T6: To be honest, I couldn't plan my lesson. You're right.

16. Observer: Thank you for your honest answer. But do you remember that at the briefing session, I told you that you're always expected to be fully prepared?
17. T6: I do, I know about it and I wanna make it up to my students. I promise.

As it is evident in Extract 2, because of high EI, T6 manages her emotions effectively and copes with stressful situations.

The stress response in Group A teachers was evident in their behavior. T2 became visibly agitated, tapping his pen and crossing his legs in response to negative feedback (Extract 2). This behavior suggests a lack of coping mechanisms and an inability to process the feedback in a constructive manner.

Group A teachers struggled to manage their emotions when faced with negative feedback. Their reactions were characterized by visible signs of stress and anxiety, such as fidgeting and agitation. For example, in Extract 1, T5 exhibits anxiety through physical signs like leg shaking and ear touching, which according to Woods and Miltenberger's (1996), they can be the signs of anxiety-related behaviors. This inability to manage stress and maintain a positive mood made it challenging for them to engage constructively with the feedback. In contrast, Group B teachers demonstrated better emotional regulation. For instance, in Extract 3, T6 accepts criticism without visible distress and even apologizes, showing a capacity to handle feedback without becoming defensive. This suggests that they possess higher emotional intelligence (EI) and are better equipped to maintain a positive mood even under stress.

Accepting Negative Feedback and Justifying One's Performance

Regarding the relationship between teachers' EI and their tendency to accept negative feedback in post-observation conferences, in the process of data collection Group A displayed similar behaviors in the post-observation conferences. After receiving negative feedback, they tended to justify their performance strongly with immediate and sometimes irrational responses. It seemed difficult for them to control their emotions and in two cases, two of the teachers (T7 and T9) even changed their tone of voice and spoke to the observer loudly. This change of voice tone took place when T7 and T9 were trying to rationalize their performance in their lessons:

Extract 4:

18. Observer: I noticed that you only taught the affirmative form of the present simple. You didn't teach the negative and the interrogative forms of the....
19. T7 (Interrupted the observer and started talking with a louder than usual voice): Yes, just the affirmative form of the target language was presented in the coursebook and I just followed the coursebook's instructions.

As it emerges from Extract 4, T7 was trying to justify her decisions and she even did not wait for the observer to finish his sentence. She interrupted him and began to talk in a loud voice.

Extract 5 shows an episode of a post-observation conference in which T9 is trying to justify her performance after receiving the first negative feedback and during the conversation, she talks to the observer with a loud voice:

Extract 5:

20. Observer: When teaching simple past, it is a good idea to add adverbs of time to end of our examples to make them more tangible for the students. I remember that your examples did not have any adverbs of time such as yesterday, last night, or last week.
21. T9: But I told them orally, I clearly remember it.
22. Observer: Yes, you did. But you'd better write them on the board. Because you wrote some examples on the board.
23. T9: But I think they got the grammatical point, I'm sure.
24. Observer: How did you make sure about their understanding? You didn't even ask any CCQs.
25. T9 (Gets agitated and responded to the observer's feedback with a loud voice): As a teacher, it is easy for me to look at the faces of my students and understand any confusion.
26. Observer: Interesting...let me put it this way...please correct me if I'm wrong... you trust your instincts when it comes to concept checking. Right?
27. T9: I don't know what to say. But...ummmm....I remember that I used adverbs of time when I was teaching past simple.

Accepting the negative feedback was quite impossible for T9. She preferred to respond to the observer's feedback with unreasonable and illogical justifications (Turn 25) than accepting the negative feedback.

On the other hand, according to analyzed data, Group B teachers happened to be more reflective and less justifying in post-observation conferences. In comparison to Group A, it was simpler for them to accept the negative feedback. However, when it was necessary, they explained the rationale behind their performance in their lessons.

Extract 6 shows a part of a post-observation conference in which T1 receives negative feedback from the observer on the number of blocking vocabulary that she pre-taught before the while-reading stage in her lesson. According to Extract 6, not only T1 accepts the negative feedback simply, but she reflects on it and identifies the reason she was not able to manage her time effectively:

Extract 6:

28. Observer: Do you the maximum number of the blocking vocabulary that should be pre-taught by the teacher in a reading lesson?
29. T1: Sorry, you've told me before but I can't remember. But I'm sure that it must be less than the words I pre-taught in my lesson.
30. Observer: Yes, right. 5 words...ok...how many words did you pre-teach?
31. T1 (She smiles): 13 words...wow...thanks for the feedback and from now on, I'm not gonna pre-teach more than five blocking vocabulary in my reading lessons.

Actually...it's interesting...umm ... I think teaching too many words may be the reason why I couldn't finish my lesson completely because I dedicated too much time on pre-teaching new vocabulary. Is it possible?

As it is evident in Extract 6, T1 is open to negative feedback and is not trying to justify her unacceptable performance. Besides, she decides to employ the feedback to improve her teaching skills.

Teachers in Group A exhibited a tendency to justify their performance excessively and irrationally when faced with criticism. For example, in Extract 4, T7 responds loudly and defensively to feedback about not teaching all forms of a target language, using justifications that indicate a struggle to accept criticism constructively. Moreover, T9 in Extract 5 shows a similar pattern of defensiveness, arguing loudly about the effectiveness of her teaching methods rather than reflecting on the feedback. This defensiveness and attempt to rationalize their performance rather than accepting the feedback highlights a lower level of EI and difficulty in reflecting on and improving from criticism.

Teachers from Group B, on the other hand, were more reflective and less defensive. Extract 6 illustrates how T1 accepts the feedback on the number of vocabulary words pre-taught and acknowledges the impact it had on the lesson's timing. T1 reflects on the feedback and identifies the reason behind her performance issues, demonstrating an openness to learning from criticism. The ability of Group B teachers to reflect on feedback, as shown in Extract 8 with T5, suggests a more collaborative and less defensive approach to feedback. They use the feedback as an opportunity to understand and improve their teaching practices, which indicates a higher level of EI.

Accepting Negative Feedback and Becoming Defensive

Holding a defensive attitude toward the observer's negative feedback was another phenomenon that emerged from the collected data. After analyzing the data, it revealed that teachers Group A became defensive against the negative feedback. They used boosters such as always, all the time, and every time to prove to the observer that they are aware of their performance and their decisions in their lessons:

Extract 7:

32. Observer: In grammar lessons, one of the terminal objectives is to enable the students to personalize the target language.
33. T2: Yes, right.
34. I believe that you didn't provide your students with a personalization activity. You could've set a freer practice to help your students personalize the TL. For example, a role-play task could be an effective activity.
35. T2: I forgot to set them a freer practice but I always do that in my lessons. All the time.

Although T2 had forgotten to enable her students to personalize the target language, she did not want to accept it and she used the boosters (such as always) to defend her teaching knowledge and awareness.

Immediate and defensive responses may reveal that the teachers belonging to Group A were not active listeners in the post-observation conferences. Moreover, they used the time while the observer was talking to prepare their response mentally to justify and defend their teaching performance. Consequently, it required longer dialogues and higher levels of mitigation (Bailey, 2006) to prepare them mentally in order to deliver them some negative feedback. Otherwise, the observer might make these teachers agitated or defensive.

However, post-observation conferences with group B of teachers were more collaborative and less tense. The observer found delivering negative feedback to this group of teachers easier and more stress-free because these teachers remained more confident after receiving negative feedback.

In comparison to Group A, Group B were active listeners and did not defend their performance immediately, whereas they reflected on their performance and attempted to focus on what the observer was trying to say:

Extract 8:

36. Observer: I really loved your lead-in, it was engaging and relevant.
37. T5: Thanks, I believe the lead-in phase is very important.
38. Observer: Yes, it is. You taught the vocabulary part very well but I noticed that you couldn't finish your lesson because you ran out of time. Am I right?
39. T5: Yes, although I planned my lesson very carefully, I couldn't manage the time.
40. Observer: When I checked your lesson plan, I noticed that you had specified 4 min for the lead-in part. But you spent about 10 min on it.
41. T5: Right! My students found it very interesting and I lost the track of time, so...I think that's the reason I couldn't finish the entire lesson.

As it is noticeable in Extract 3, not only T2 did not become agitated after receiving negative feedback, he remained confident and reflected on his lesson plan and his performance. Then he diagnosed the faulty part of his lesson by getting the clue from the observer. As mentioned before, people with higher EI have higher levels of positive mood. People with higher EI also showed less reduction in their positive mood after a negative situation (Schutte et al., 2002).

Extract 9:

42. Observer: Do you remember that we talked about the importance of CCQs in teaching grammar?
43. T6: Yes, I do. We talked about it last week.
44. Observer: Right. I noticed that you were teaching the grammar *used to*. You just explained the target language and highlighted its functions. In your opinion wasn't it necessary to ask some CCQs to check your students' understanding?
45. T6: At that moment I thought that it wasn't necessary to ask CCQs from Intermediate students. Do you think I had to ask them?
46. Observer: What do you think? I wanna know your opinion.

47. T6: I think it wasn't a bad idea to be more obsessive about the students' understanding of the target language. I'll try to ask more CCQs in my lessons even in higher level classes. Thank you sir.

The attitude of Teacher 6 toward post observation feedback is more optimistic than the teachers in Group A. She did not become defensive after receiving the negative feedback. Instead, she accepted the negative feedback and decided to employ it in her lessons.

All in all, two groups of teachers showed different responses to feedback (see Fig. 1). Group A teachers often used defensive language to counteract negative feedback. Extract 7 shows T2 using the term "always" to counteract criticism about missing a personalization activity. This indicates an attempt to protect their self-image rather than addressing the feedback constructively. The defensive responses and the focus on justifying their actions suggest that these teachers were not actively listening to the feedback but were preparing their defenses. This lack of engagement likely hindered their ability to benefit from the feedback.

However, Group B teachers were more open to feedback and did not resort to defensive tactics. Extract 9 demonstrates T6's willingness to discuss and reconsider the necessity of Concept Checking Questions (CCQs), showing a constructive attitude toward feedback and a willingness to adjust her practices based on the observer's input. The more collaborative nature of Group B teachers' responses reflects a higher level of EI and a greater ability to engage positively with feedback, which contributes to their overall effectiveness in incorporating constructive criticism into their teaching practice.

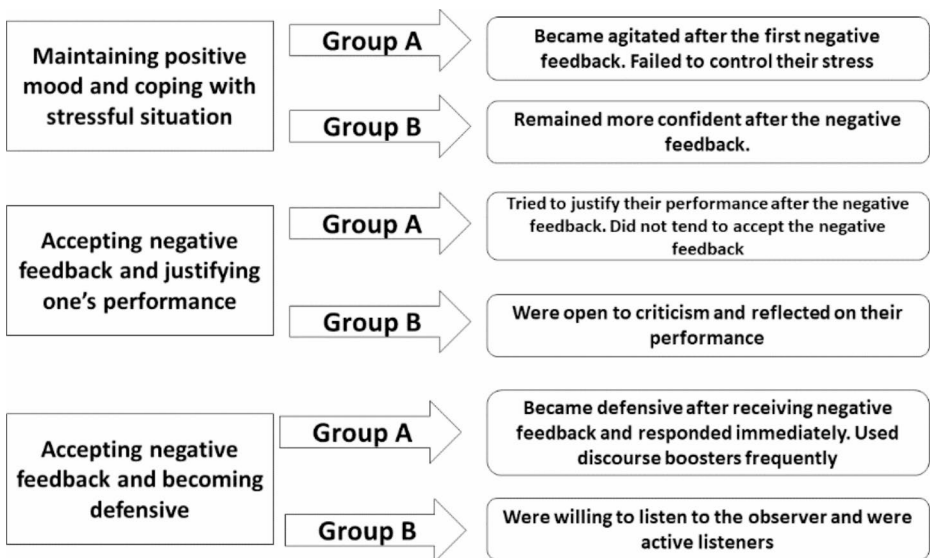


Fig. 1 High and low EI teacher groups and their response to the observer's feedback

Discussion

The study investigated how teachers' EI influences their responses to post-observation feedback. Eleven Iranian EFL teachers were categorized into high and low EI groups based on EI test results. Following observed classes, post-observation conferences were conducted, audio-recorded and analyzed. Thematic analysis identified three key response patterns. First, "maintaining positive moods and coping with stressful situations" which means that high EI teachers demonstrated better emotional regulation, maintaining positivity and coping effectively with stress during feedback sessions. Second, "accepting negative feedback and justifying one's performance" that means that high EI teachers were more open to criticism, accepted negative feedback with grace, and engaged in constructive reflection on their performance and finally, "accepting negative feedback and becoming defensive". In contrast, low EI teachers tended to become defensive when receiving negative feedback. They often justified their performance, reacted emotionally, and struggled to control their stress levels. This adds to Yüce et al. (2023), who concluded that negative emotions may impact the teachers' performance and future trajectory, by considering EI as an influencing factor. Additionally, Yüce et al. (2024) provided insights into how emotional vulnerability and coping strategies among student teachers shape their experiences and future perceptions, highlighting the importance of EI in managing these challenges. Noughabi et al. (2024) highlighted the significance of emotional factors in the professional development of EFL teachers, emphasizing that enjoyment and positive emotional experiences, as components of EI, play a crucial role in coping with the challenges faced in teaching environments. These findings are further supported by the dynamic nature of Foreign Language Teaching Enjoyment (FLTE) observed in Iranian and Turkish teachers, indicating that personal and contextual factors significantly shape emotional experiences and responses.

The current literature on applying EI to different aspects of human life, such as education is already rich (e.g., Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021; Michinov & Michinov, 2022; Penrose et al., 2007). EI has been found to be influential in human psychology and its potential impact on human behavior has been long investigated (Kim & Park, 2020; Svyantek & Afzalur Rahim, 2002). Nonetheless, the current study attempted to bring this topic into the spotlight in EFL classrooms and investigate how teachers with different levels of EI act and react in the post-observation feedback sessions. Three themes emerged from the data in which two groups of teachers with low and high EI – i.e. group A (low) and group B (high) – were compared (see Fig. 1).

The findings of the study are in line with Schutte et al. (2002) which considered people with higher EI to have higher levels of self-esteem and positive mood. In the current study, group B did not lose their confidence after receiving negative feedback. However, group A failed to control their stress and became irritable after receiving negative feedback. In the same vein, Ramesar et al. (2009) presented well-defined and clear evidence that supports the significant role of EI in coping with stress. Their findings prove that people with high EI are more capable of using adaptive coping styles when they experience stressful life events.

Stress, per se, has been found to be a factor impacted by EI. The findings of this study are in line with Fteiha and Awwad (2020) who revealed a significant and favorable association between EI and coping mechanisms for stress. However, it contradicts the findings of Gohm et al. (2005) who reported mixed results for the relationship between EI and stress conclud-

ing that the potential benefits of EI in managing stress may vary among individuals, as it may not be necessary or applicable to everyone.

Feedback acceptance is a psychological trait that refers to the willingness of an individual to receive and consider information from others about their behavior, performance, or attitudes. Accepting feedback involves being open and receptive to suggestions, criticism, or observations, even if they may be difficult to hear or acknowledge. Ashford et al. (2003) identified several key individual differences that affect feedback-seeking behavior, such as personality traits, EI, motivation, and self-esteem. Similarly, Kowalski (2017) suggested that EI has a direct impact on accepting feedback which is fully in line with the current study findings in which high EI teachers showed more tendency to accept the feedback, particularly the negative ones. Group B teachers in this study who possess higher EI not only showed higher tendency towards accepting the negative feedback but also were more open to criticism and were active listeners. In another study, Costa et al. (2017) suggested that EI and acceptance are interconnected. They found them as a mediator factor in treating depression and concluded that people with higher EI showed higher levels of acceptance.

EI has also been found to be inversely related to defensive behavior in individuals (Pel-litteri, 2002). Defensive behavior is defined as the tendency to become emotionally reactive or to engage in self-protective actions when one feels criticized or challenged. This study, in accordance with a line of research, has shown that individuals with high levels of EI are more likely to use constructive responses to negative feedback and criticism, such as accepting the feedback and using it to improve performance, rather than becoming defensive (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2020). In contrast, individuals with lower levels of EI may be more prone to reacting defensively to negative feedback, which can harm relationships and hinder personal growth (Bibi et al., 2020).

All in all, the findings of the study suggest that teachers with higher EI are more likely to accept feedback and probably could employ it to construct their performance, while also being better equipped to cope with stress. Furthermore, the study reinforces the idea that individuals with higher levels of EI are less likely to react defensively to negative feedback, which can positively impact their personal growth and relationships. Overall, this study adds to the growing body of literature on the role of EI in different aspects of human life and emphasizes the need for further research in this area.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of awareness about teachers' EI in post-observation feedback sessions. The findings of the study suggest that teachers with higher EI are more likely to accept feedback and have a tendency to use it constructively to improve their performance. They are also better equipped to cope with stress and less likely to react defensively to negative feedback, which can positively impact their personal growth and relationships.

The study also contributes to the growing body of literature on the role of EI in different aspects of human life, reinforcing the idea that individuals with higher levels of EI are more prone to possess positive psychological traits, such as self-esteem and positive mood, and to use adaptive coping styles when experiencing stressful events. Furthermore, this study

aligns with previous research indicating that EI has a direct impact on accepting feedback and is inversely related to defensive behavior in individuals.

However, this study is not without its limitations. First, the study focused only on EFL teachers, and the findings might not be generalizable to other populations or contexts. Second, the study was conducted in a single country, and cultural factors may have influenced the results. Third, due to the presence of a number of limitations, we could not increase the number of the participants. Future studies could investigate the impact of cultural differences on the relationship between EI and feedback acceptance in different educational settings.

Teacher educators could benefit from training programs that focus on developing EI skills, such as self-regulation and social awareness, which could enhance their feedback acceptance, stress coping, and constructive responses to negative feedback. By promoting EI development among teachers, these programs could ultimately improve the quality of education in EFL classrooms and enhance the learning experience for students. Effective strategies for delivering EI training could include workshops or courses focused on developing skills such as emotional self-regulation, empathy, and effective communication. It is important to incorporate EI into pre-service and in-service professional development programs because it can equip teachers with the emotional competencies necessary to navigate feedback sessions constructively.

It would be beneficial for future studies to explore several paths. First, expanding the number of participants could strengthen the study's findings and allow for deeper exploration of potential factors affecting teachers' responsiveness. Second, further investigation could extend beyond EFL contexts to encompass diverse educational settings. This can help us enhance the generalizability of findings concerning the impact of EI on feedback reception. Third, comparative studies across different cultural backgrounds would shed light on how cultural factors influence the relationship between EI and responses to feedback.

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Data Availability Data cannot be shared openly to protect study participant privacy. However, it is available and will be shared upon request.

Declarations

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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