

## The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Teachers' Job Satisfaction: Mediating Role of Psychological Distress

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**ABSTRACT** This cross-sectional descriptive study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction among Azerbaijani teachers and examined the mediating role of depression, anxiety, and stress on this relationship. Data were collected online from a convenience sample of 668 teachers, using three validated scales, that is, the Job Satisfaction Scale, the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale, and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire. The mean age of participants was 43.08 (SD 11.28), with the majority of participants being females (82.8%). The results of the correlation analysis indicated a significant positive association between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. The bootstrapping procedure showed that psychological distress, including depression, anxiety and stress, partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of addressing the personal psychological distress of teachers, in addition to developing their emotional intelligence, to enhance their job satisfaction. Implications for future research and teacher well-being are discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition is a global issue that affects the educational systems worldwide. Whether in the form of school shifting or leaving the profession altogether, high rates of teacher turnover not only put educational systems at financial risk but also lead to poor academic progress and lower-quality education (Madigan and Kim 2021). In the United States, for example, a 2021 survey found that around 25 percent of teachers expressed plans to quit in the upcoming school year (Steiner and Woo 2021). In this regard, the last years have seen increased scientific interest in the topic of teacher retention. In order to tackle this problem, it is crucial for policymakers and educational authorities to gain an understanding of the key factors that play a role in determining teachers' job satisfaction and retention, and to promote awareness of these factors (Crossman and Harris 2006).

The level of job satisfaction among teachers is a crucial factor that influences their retention in the teaching profession. According to Aliyev (2018), job satisfaction is a critical characteristic of school functioning, which can affect the quality of education provided to students. Somech and Drach-Zahavy (2000) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found that job satisfaction is a significant predictor of teachers' intention to quit. Moreover, studies conducted in different national contexts have also supported this hypothesis, indicating that teachers who are more satisfied with their jobs are less likely to leave (Ladd 2011). Therefore, it is essential to promote job satisfaction among teachers to ensure that they remain in the teaching profession and provide quality education to students.

So far, research investigating teachers' job satisfaction mainly focused on personal and demographic characteristics without elucidating the role of school-related factors. Several studies have emphasised the significance of school-based aspects in relation to teachers' job satisfaction. For instance, research has shown that high-quality academic environments, mu-

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tual appreciation, and teamwork can have a positive impact on teachers' job satisfaction (Iwu et al. 2017; Chun et al. 2019). Various factors affect teacher job satisfaction, and emotional intelligence is one of these factors. Moreover, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as an increasingly important factor in teacher retention, given its potential to minimise the negative outcomes of emotional labour and enhance employees' well-being (Duran et al. 2004). Recent research has suggested that emotional intelligence (EI) is positively associated with various aspects of well-being, including life satisfaction, social support, and career success (Kafetsios and Zampetakis 2008; Sánchez-Álvarez et al. 2015). Specifically, teachers with higher levels of EI tend to experience greater job satisfaction, better personal and social relationships, and a greater sense of accomplishment in their careers. These findings highlight the importance of promoting emotional intelligence among teachers as a means of improving their overall well-being and job performance. The global recognition of the significance of emotional intelligence and the desire to work as a teacher is well-established. Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between teachers' emotional experiences and their teaching approach. For instance, Trigwell (2012) found that positive emotions, such as joy and enthusiasm, are positively correlated with a student-oriented teaching approach, while negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, are associated with a transmission-based approach. In other words, teachers who experience positive emotions are more likely to focus on student learning and understanding, while those who experience negative emotions are more likely to emphasise the delivery of content. Furthermore, emotional intelligence has been shown to be a critical factor in teachers' emotional experiences and teaching methods (Hosotani and Imai-Matsumura 2011). Emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to identify, comprehend, and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. It involves the ability to perceive and regulate emotions, communicate them effectively, and utilise them to facilitate thought and behaviour. In essence, emotional intelligence entails a range of skills that enable individuals to navigate their social and emotional world effectively. Accord-

ing to Hosotani and Imai-Matsumura (2011), teachers who have high emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage their emotions in the classroom and create a positive learning environment for their students. They are also more likely to engage in student-centred teaching practices, such as active listening and empathy, which have been linked to positive student outcomes.

### Present Study

The field of education is notorious for the significant occupational stress that teachers experience, which can result in emotional fatigue, reduced job satisfaction, mental health issues, and ultimately, attrition (Prati et al. 2009; Ciarrochi and Scott 2006; Austin et al. 2005). However, it is worth noting that such stress could impact work attitudes, promote altruistic behaviour, improve work outcomes, and mitigate interpersonal conflicts and related stress (Carmeli 2003). This is particularly true in today's world, where teachers face new and complex challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increased demands on student achievement, and the need to integrate technology into their teaching (Harmsen et al. 2018). Teachers who experience challenges in their personal adjustment may have an adverse impact on the learning environment, student welfare, and the broader educational system (Chang 2009).

Understanding the factors that contribute to coping with teacher stress and promoting psychological well-being is crucial. Research has shown that emotional intelligence is positively associated with general well-being and negatively associated with depression and anxiety (Prati et al. 2009; Ciarrochi and Scott 2006; Austin et al. 2005). This highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in mitigating the negative effects of stress and promoting mental health among teachers. In addition to emotional intelligence, coping strategies can also play a significant role in managing teacher stress and improving job satisfaction. Seeking social support has been found to be an effective coping strategy for teachers, as it can provide emotional support and a sense of connection (Darmody and Smyth 2016). Engaging in physical activity has also been shown to be a useful strategy for reducing stress and promoting overall well-being.

As the teaching profession has been shown to have significantly higher levels of stress when compared to the general population (Chang and Davis 2009), it is crucial to investigate the psychological distress and coping mechanisms of teachers. In Azerbaijan, as in many other countries, there is a lack of research on these important issues. Future studies could investigate the specific factors that contribute to teacher retention in Azerbaijan, as well as the coping strategies that teachers use to manage occupational stress. Such research could help inform policy decisions and institutional strategies that better support teachers' psychological well-being and ultimately improve the quality of education.

### Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and teacher job satisfaction and to explore the potential mechanisms that may mediate or moderate this relationship. Specifically, the researchers will examine whether psychological distress mediates or moderates this relationship and whether emotional intelligence can buffer the negative effects of psychological distress on teacher job satisfaction. By examining these factors, the researchers hope to contribute to the understanding of how emotional intelligence can promote teacher well-being and satisfaction and to inform the development of interventions and strategies that can enhance these outcomes. The study will have important implications for educational authorities and policymakers. It will provide insights into the factors that influence teacher job satisfaction and well-being and the potential mechanisms that can be targeted to promote positive outcomes for teachers and students alike.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

This cross-sectional study utilised a descriptive design and included a sample of 668 teachers who were employed in schools located in Baku, Azerbaijan, during the survey period (December 2022 to January 2023). The participants were recruited to the study by means of snow-

ball convenience sampling. The researchers first identified all schools situated within the diameter of the capital of Baku. The online Google Form surveys were sent to the first cohort of teachers via the instant messaging platform WhatsApp. The first cohort consisted of the teachers who passed supervised educational training at the Psychology Scientific Research Institute during previous years. The first cohort would forward the form to their fellow teachers until the intended sample size was reached.

Before taking part in the research, all participants were presented with an informed consent form, which explicitly detailed the purpose of the study, its procedures, and the potential advantages and drawbacks. Participants were given instructions to review the form carefully and to raise any inquiries they had before signing the form to indicate their informed consent to participate. To indicate their voluntary agreement to participate in the study, participants were required to provide their electronic signature and check the 'I agree' button on the informed consent form.

### Measurement Tools

*The Job Satisfaction Scale* (Hackman and Oldham 1975) is a widely used tool to measure an individual's job-related evaluation, including in the field of education. The scale consists of 14 items, such as "The amount of salary and bonuses I receive", "The recognition I get for doing a good job", and "The chance to do something that makes use of my abilities". Participants respond to each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ("It does not satisfy me at all") to 5 ("It satisfies me very much"). Scores on the Job Satisfaction Scale can range from 14 to 70, with higher scores indicating greater job satisfaction. Previous research on teachers by Tasdan et al. (2008) found that the scale is one-dimensional, meaning that it measures a single construct of job satisfaction. The factor-loading values of the items in the scale ranged from .69 to .86, indicating good convergent validity, and the item-total correlations ranged between .66 and .84, suggesting high internal consistency. The scale explains 64 percent of the total variance in job satisfaction, indicating that it is a reliable and valid measure

of this construct. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, a measure of internal consistency, was .95, indicating that the scale has high reliability.

**Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS - 21)** is a self-report questionnaire developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) that aims to evaluate negative emotional symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and stress. This instrument comprises 21 items, with seven items assessing each of the three dimensions of depression ("I could not seem to experience any positive feeling at all"), anxiety ("I experienced trembling"), and stress ("I felt that I was rather touchy"). Participants are requested to rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 to 3, where a score of 0 denotes that the statement does not apply to them at all, while a score of 3 signifies that the statement applies to them most of the time. The total score for each subscale ranges from 0 to 21, with higher scores indicating higher levels of depression, anxiety, or stress. In clinical samples, the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the DASS-21 has been found to be high, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.87 for the subscales of depression, anxiety and stress. Furthermore, the scale has demonstrated good construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity across different studies. The DASS-21 has been widely used in research to evaluate negative emotional symptoms in various populations, including teachers.

**Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Short Form (TEIQ-S)** is a widely used self-report questionnaire developed by Petrides and Furnham (2000, 2001) to measure emotional intelligence. The scale is composed of 20 items, such as "I often think about what I am feeling", and is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("totally agree"). The TEIQ-S has been found to have good construct validity, with explanatory factor analysis revealing a four-factor structure, including well-being, self-control, emotionality, and sociability. Confirmatory factor analysis has also provided support for the four-factor structure. The internal consistency reliability of the TEIQ-S was found to be high, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .81. Additionally, the test-retest reliability of the total score was .86. Scores for each of the

four factors range from 4 to 28, with higher scores indicating higher levels of emotional intelligence. The TEIQ-S is a reliable and valid measure of emotional intelligence and can be used in various settings, including research, clinical, and educational contexts, to assess and improve emotional intelligence.

### Data Analysis

To investigate the relationships between emotional intelligence, psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress), and job satisfaction among the sample of 668 teachers from schools in Baku, Azerbaijan, a correlational analysis was performed. IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 was used to calculate descriptive statistics, which included the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis.

To test the potential mediation role of psychological distress, a bootstrapping procedure was conducted using the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008). Specifically, Model 4 was used, and 5,000 resamples were analysed to determine the significance of the mediation coefficients in increasing job satisfaction through the effects of emotional intelligence on psychological distress. To determine the significance of the indirect effect, the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval was utilised, with the proviso that the effect would only be deemed significant if the confidence interval did not include zero (Satici 2016). This approach provides a more detailed description of the methods used, which can help the reader understand the analysis more clearly.

## RESULTS

The majority of participants were females (82.8%). The mean age of the participants was 43.08 years, with a standard deviation of 11.28, and the age range varied between 22 and 65 years old. In terms of teaching experience, the participants had an average of 19.04 years of teaching experience, with a standard deviation of 11.45. The range of teaching experience was between 1 and 45 years. When it comes to their income satisfaction level, 32.5 percent of the teachers reported being satisfied with their income, while the remaining 67.5 percent were not satisfied.

These findings suggest that the majority of the teachers in this sample were not content with their income level, which could potentially impact their job satisfaction and overall well-being.

In this study emotional intelligence was positively related to job satisfaction ( $r = .310, p < .01$ ) and negatively related to depression ( $r = -.365, p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $r = -.310, p < .01$ ), and stress ( $r = -.316, p < .01$ ). In addition, job satisfaction is negatively related to depression ( $r = -.292, p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $r = -.291, p < .01$ ), and stress ( $r = -.279, p < .01$ ). This suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience less depression, anxiety, and stress, and greater job satisfaction. Additionally, depression, anxiety, and stress are positively correlated with each other, indicating that individuals who experience

higher levels of one of these negative emotions are likely to experience higher levels of the others. All three negative emotions are negatively correlated with job satisfaction, suggesting that individuals who experience more of these negative emotions are less satisfied with their job (Table 1).

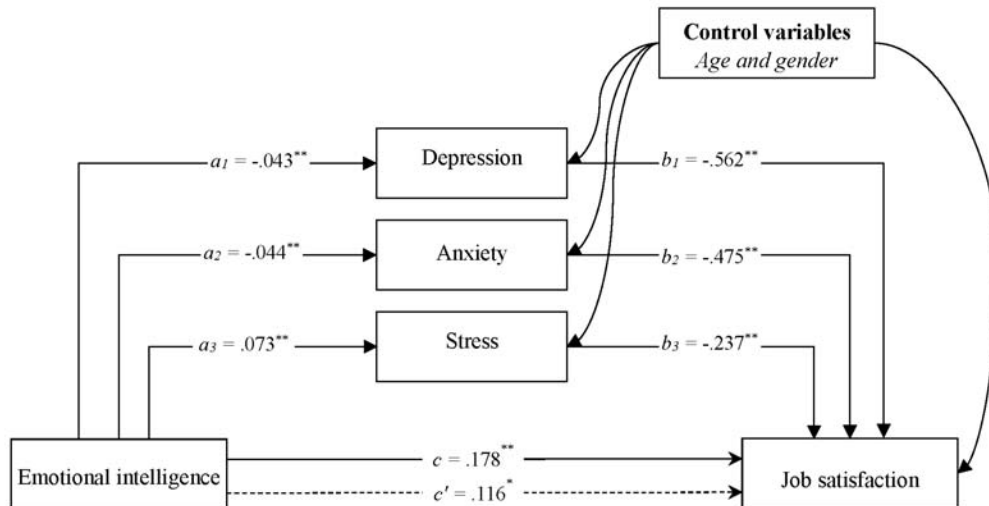
**Mediation Analysis**

A bootstrapping procedure was employed to examine the mediating role of depression, anxiety, and stress in the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. The regression pathways and both the direct and indirect effects were analysed, and the results are presented in Figure 1 and Table 2.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Emotional intelligence	–				
2. Depression	-.365**	–			
3. Anxiety	-.310**	.470**	–		
4. Stress	-.316**	.482**	.520**	–	
5. Job satisfaction	.310**	-.292**	-.291**	-.279**	–
Mean	101.83	2.06	2.74	5.89	48.21
SD	17.75	2.10	2.52	4.11	9.97
Skewness	.041	1.21	1.02	.519	-.438
Kurtosis	-.787	1.13	.638	-.310	.044

\*\* $p < .01$



**Fig. 1. Mediation analysis**



**Table 2: Emotional intelligence predicts job satisfaction through psychological distress**

Variable	Value	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
<i>Bootstrap results for indirect effect</i>				
EI > Depression → JS	.043	.016	.011	.075
EI > Anxiety → JS	.037	.014	.010	.066
EI > Stress → JS	.031	.015	.002	

Note: Bootstrap sample size = 5000; LL lower limit; UL upper limit; CI confidence interval; EI emotional intelligence; JS job satisfaction

When the direct effects were examined (see Table 2), emotional intelligence significantly negatively predicted depression ( $B = -0.043$ ,  $t = -9.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $B = -0.044$ ,  $t = -8.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and stress ( $B = -0.073$ ,  $t = -8.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, job satisfaction was predicted by depression ( $B = -0.562$ ,  $t = -2.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $B = -0.475$ ,  $t = -2.74$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and stress ( $B = -0.237$ ,  $t = -2.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, a bootstrap analysis was conducted, which validated the indirect effects of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction, as the 95 percent confidence intervals did not contain zero. Consequently, it was found that depression (bootstrap value = .043, 95% CI = .011, .075), anxiety (bootstrap value = .037, 95% CI = .010, .066), and stress (bootstrap value = .031, 95% CI = .002, .062) acted as mediators in the relationship between emotional intelligence and teachers' job satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

The main aim of this research was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction among teachers, and to explore whether psychological distress mediates this relationship. The study results demonstrated that psychological distress plays a significant mediating role in the association between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction in the teaching profession. Specifically, the findings suggest that emotional intelligence is positively related to job satisfaction, while psychological distress is negatively associated with job satisfaction. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of considering psychological distress as a mediator in the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction among teachers. The results of this study have important implications for teacher training programs and interventions aimed at promoting emotional intelligence and well-being in the workplace.

The investigation is especially important in the current post-pandemic period. The coronavirus pandemic and pandemic-related restrictions, social isolation and long period of online learning left a negative impact not only on the learning process itself but also on the teachers' job satisfaction level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers' job satisfaction was primarily affected by the unexpected shift of all educational facilities in Azerbaijan to the digital learning process. According to Besser et al. (2022), the abrupt shift in work routines led to stress and confusion among teachers because they were not familiar with digital teaching platforms and lacked confidence in using them (as cited in UNESCO 2020). Furthermore, a study conducted by Thiyyarajan et al. (2020) revealed that the online learning environment differed significantly from the traditional classroom in terms of learner motivation, satisfaction, and interaction in a negative way. This also contributed to psychological distress among teachers. High levels of psychological distress can lead to other mental health problems, such as stress, depression and anxiety. The more stressed, anxious and depressed teachers are, the more behavioural problems their students' experience. In addition, extended periods of stress among teachers not only have a negative association with their job satisfaction but also a positive association with their intention to quit the teaching profession (Agyapong et al. 2022). Additionally, such stress may lead to behaviours of withdrawal, which may involve leaving the work environment either physically or psychologically. Thus, the results of the study are synchronous with the existing approach to psychological distress as a mediator of the association between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.

The income satisfaction level of teachers is also a critical aspect to consider, as it has been

linked to their motivation and job performance. Hence, understanding the factors influencing teachers' income satisfaction is essential for developing effective interventions to improve their job satisfaction and well-being.

Research has shown that teachers with high EI are more successful in meeting their job demands (Bar-On 2010). Moreover, numerous studies have demonstrated that high emotional intelligence is associated with positive outcomes, such as improved school management and better coping strategies for psychological distress (Anari 2012). In light of these results, researchers, stakeholders and local administration should unite their efforts in addressing the issue of low emotional intelligence and stress-coping strategies among teachers.

The current formal education system has increased the demands and responsibilities on teachers, leading to heightened anxiety in teachers with low emotional intelligence. Different teachers may experience varying levels of psychological distress in response to different school-related stressors, ranging from mild frustration to emotional exhaustion, depression, and psychosomatic symptoms. These teachers may experience emotional arousal and changes in all aspects of their lives, resulting in changes in behaviour and attitude towards work and responsibilities. Students may also experience behavioural issues due to their teachers' stress, anxiety or depression.

The findings of this study emphasise the significance of emotional intelligence and psychological distress in comprehending the determinants of teachers' job satisfaction. The results suggest that teachers who possess high emotional intelligence are more likely to report higher job satisfaction levels, whereas those with lower emotional intelligence may experience increased psychological distress and job dissatisfaction. Therefore, educational institutions and policymakers should pay close attention to the emotional intelligence and psychological well-being of teachers to create a more positive and supportive work environment that enhances job satisfaction and retention rates. Therefore, interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence and improving coping strategies for psychological distress among teachers can have a positive impact on job satisfaction and overall well-being.

It is worth noting that the issue of teacher retention is not limited to Azerbaijan or the United States but is a global concern. Educational systems around the world are facing similar challenges, and research on teacher retention and job satisfaction can help identify common factors and best practices for addressing these challenges. Ultimately, the well-being of teachers is closely tied to a student's well-being and the education system's overall success. By supporting teacher retention and well-being, one can help ensure all students have access to high-quality education and a bright future.

## CONCLUSION

This study represents the first attempt in Azerbaijan to investigate the issue of job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and psychological distress among local teachers. The findings of the study revealed that psychological distress plays a crucial mediating role in the association between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction of teachers. In other words, there is a direct positive relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction among teachers, while a negative association exists between emotional intelligence and psychological distress. Specifically, teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence reported lower levels of psychological distress, which in turn increased their job satisfaction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this review have several implications for teacher education and professional development. Teacher training programs should incorporate emotional intelligence training, as it is a crucial component of effective teaching. By developing emotional intelligence skills, teachers can improve their job satisfaction, which may lead to improved student outcomes. Additionally, schools should provide support and resources for teachers who may be experiencing psychological distress. By addressing psychological distress, schools can improve teachers' job satisfaction and overall well-being.

## LIMITATIONS

Although the researchers tried to make the study as comprehensive as possible, there were still some limitations. The first limitation is that

the study used a cross-sectional design and did not focus on establishing causal relations between variables. The second limitation is that the participants were teachers living in Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan, and the surrounding regions. Therefore, one cannot generalise the results of the study to participants from other regions. Another concern is that the participants in the study were predominantly women. However, the researchers do not consider this as a major limitation for the generalisability or validity of the study in Azerbaijan, as the majority of teachers in the country are women. Nevertheless, more inclusive results can be achieved in the future if the gender gap is more balanced. Third limitation is that the research was conducted online, so the results could be subject to self-report bias.

#### AUTHORNOTE

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest exists for this manuscript for any of the authors.

#### AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIAL

Data will be available on request.

#### PRE-REGISTRATION STATEMENT

This study was not pre-registered.

#### ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its following updates. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Council of the Psychology Scientific Research Institute (Number: T-231).

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants that were included in the study.

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