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Relationship between professional effectiveness and social intelligence of elementary school teachers

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Abstract

The study sought to examine the relationship between Social Intelligence (SI) and Professional Effectiveness (PE) among elementary school teachers in Kerala, as well as to analyse the differential influence of selected socio-demographic factors on this relationship. Adopting a descriptive correlational design, the study employed the normative survey method to collect data from a stratified random sample of 627 elementary school teachers drawn from the Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, and Kozhikode districts of Kerala, India. Data were gathered using the Professional Effectiveness Scale for Elementary School Teachers and the Social Intelligence Test for Teachers. Two null hypotheses were tested using Pearson's product-moment coefficient of correlation and Fisher's z-transformation test. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness for the total sample as well as across various subgroups of teachers. Significant gender-based differences were observed in the strength of this relationship, with a stronger association found among male teachers. Educational qualification also emerged as a significant moderator, with trained postgraduate teachers exhibiting a stronger relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness than trained graduate teachers and diploma-holding teachers. The findings were interpreted in the context of recent literature, and implications for teacher professional training and practice were discussed.

Keywords: Professional effectiveness, social intelligence, elementary school teachers

Introduction

Effective classroom practice is shaped not only by teachers' subject mastery and pedagogical expertise but also by their ability to manage social interactions, interpret social cues, and cultivate collaborative relationships that support learning. In recent years, research on teacher professional effectiveness has expanded beyond traditional indicators such as instructional competence and classroom management to include socio-affective and interpersonal dimensions that meaningfully influence teaching outcomes (Amemasor *et al.*, 2025; Liu, 2025) ^[1, 8]. At the core of these socio-affective dimensions lies teachers' ability to accurately perceive social situations, adapt their behaviour appropriately, and manage interpersonal relationships effectively (Collie *et al.*, 2025; Özdoğru, 2024; Aswathy *et al.*, 2024) ^[4, 10, 3]. This set of abilities has emerged as a significant construct in educational psychology and is commonly conceptualized as Social Intelligence (SI), (Paul & Arjunan, 2018) ^[11]. In educational settings, SI is closely associated with the quality of classroom climate, student engagement, peer collaboration, and parent-teacher relationships (Ejide & Loretta, 2025) ^[6]. Teachers with higher levels of social intelligence are better equipped to interpret students' emotional and behavioural cues, manage conflicts constructively, and promote inclusive participation, thereby fostering environments conducive to learning (Özdoğru, 2024; Aryani, 2024) ^[10, 2].

Empirical studies conducted over the past five years provide converging evidence for a positive association between social intelligence and teacher effectiveness (e.g., Naik & Behera, 2023; Dash, 2021) ^[9, 5]. Correlational research involving in-service and pre-service teachers has reported statistically significant relationships between SI and indicators such as professional effectiveness, classroom management, and innovative work behaviour (Smith & Kumar, 2025) ^[12].

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These findings suggest that social intelligence contributes directly to effective classroom practices and indirectly to professional growth by enabling teachers to engage productively in collegial learning and school improvement initiatives (Aryani *et al.*, 2024) ^[2]. Despite these encouraging findings, existing literature exhibits notable methodological and conceptual limitations. Many investigations are based on convenience samples, often focusing on secondary teachers, teacher trainees, or geographically restricted populations. Considerable variation in measurement tools for both social intelligence and teacher effectiveness further complicates comparison and generalization of findings (Karacabey & Adlım, 2025) ^[7]. The gap is even more pronounced in the context of elementary education. Much of the recent research on social intelligence and teacher outcomes focuses on secondary or pre-service teachers, providing only indirect insights into elementary classrooms, where developmental needs, classroom structures, and parental involvement differ substantially. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing theoretical understanding and informing targeted interventions aimed at enhancing professional effectiveness among elementary school teachers.

Objective

The study was undertaken with the following objectives

- To examine the relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers in Kerala.
- To determine the differential influence of selected demographic variables on the relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study

- There is no significant relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers in Kerala.
- There is no significant difference in the degree of relationship between social intelligence and professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers with respect to gender, educational qualification, type of school management, and length of professional experience.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design and employed the normative survey method to collect data from a stratified random sample of 332 elementary school teachers (Male=101; Female=231) drawn from three districts of Kerala. Stratification of the population was carried out on the basis of socio-cultural zones (Travancore, Kochi, and Malabar), school locale (rural and urban), and type of school management (government, aided, and unaided). Data were collected using the following instruments.

- **Professional Effectiveness Scale for Elementary School Teachers (PESEST):** The PESEST is a 60-item, five-point rating scale designed to assess six dimensions of teachers' professional effectiveness, namely: (i) professional planning and preparation, (ii) professional dedication, (iii) professional ethos, (iv) professional expertise, (v) classroom leadership and

management, and (vi) professional relationships. The scale has a criterion validity coefficient of 0.67 and a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.76.

- **Social Intelligence Test for Teachers (SITT) (Arjunan & Thushara, 2015) ^[11]:** The SITT is a standardized 50-item, five-point psychometric instrument measuring five dimensions of social intelligence, namely: social knowledge, pro-social attitude, social skills, social understanding, and social memory. The test has a criterion validity coefficient of 0.77 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.82 over a four-week interval.

In addition, a Background Information Form (BIF) was used to obtain the demographic details required for the study. The PESEST and SITT were administered personally by the first investigator. The response sheets were scored manually, and the data were tabulated using Microsoft Excel. Statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21). Pearson's product-moment coefficient of correlation and Fisher's z-transformation test were employed for data analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

The coefficient of correlation between social intelligence (SI) and professional effectiveness (PE) of elementary school teachers was computed using Pearson's product-moment method for the total sample as well as for the various subgroups. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Analysis of the total sample revealed a statistically significant association between SI and PE among elementary school teachers ($r=0.581$, $p<.001$). The magnitude of the correlation indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between the two variables. The standard error of the correlation coefficient was found to be 0.026, suggesting a high level of stability and accuracy in the estimated r value. As the standard error is considerably below 0.05, the obtained correlation can be regarded as a precise and dependable estimate of the population parameter. Further examination of confidence limits shows that the population correlation between SI and PE is likely to fall between 0.53 and 0.63 at the .05 level of significance and between 0.51 and 0.65 at the .01 level. Subgroup analysis indicated notable variation in the strength of the relationship. The strongest association was observed among trained postgraduate teachers ($r=0.740$, $p<.001$), whereas the weakest, though still substantial, relationship emerged among female teachers ($r=0.520$, $p<.001$). Importantly, the correlations computed for all subgroups were positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of social intelligence are consistently linked with greater professional effectiveness among elementary school teachers.

The magnitude of the association between social intelligence and professional effectiveness may vary across different categories of elementary school teachers. Examining these variations makes it possible to assess whether the relationship between the two constructs remains consistent or differs among specific groups. Such subgroup-level analysis offers deeper understanding of the role played by personal attributes and institutional contexts in shaping the contribution of social intelligence to teachers' professional functioning. Accordingly, the correlation coefficients obtained between social intelligence and

professional effectiveness for subgroups defined by gender, educational qualification, school management type, and years of teaching experience were systematically compared using Fisher's z-transformation test (See Table 2).

The comparative analysis of correlation coefficients between professional effectiveness (PE) and social intelligence (SI) across different teacher subgroups yielded several noteworthy findings. A statistically significant difference was observed between male and female teachers in terms of the strength of the relationship between PE and SI ($Z_{\text{observed}}=3.281$, $p<.001$), with the association being more pronounced among male teachers. Educational qualification also emerged as an important differentiating factor. The correlation between PE and SI differed significantly between trained postgraduate teachers and diploma-holding teachers ($Z_{\text{observed}}=3.075$, $p<.001$), favoring trained postgraduate teachers. In addition, a significant variation was noted between trained postgraduate teachers and trained graduate teachers with respect to the strength of the association between the two variables ($Z_{\text{observed}}=2.171$, $p<.05$). In contrast, no statistically meaningful differences were found when teachers were classified according to the type of school management, indicating a relatively uniform

relationship between PE and SI across government, aided, and unaided schools. Similarly, length of teaching experience did not emerge as a significant factor influencing the degree of association between social intelligence and professional effectiveness among elementary school teachers.

Discussion

The results of the present investigation clearly demonstrate a meaningful and statistically significant association between social intelligence and professional effectiveness among elementary school teachers. The moderate strength of the correlation observed for the overall sample suggests that teachers possessing higher levels of social sensitivity, interpersonal insight, and adaptive social behaviour are more likely to perform effectively in instructional settings and participate constructively in professional interactions. This finding aligns with recent empirical evidence identifying social intelligence as an essential socio-emotional competency that supports effective teaching practices and sustained professional performance (Aryani *et al.*, 2024; Özdoğru, 2024) [2, 10].

Table 1: Correlation between social intelligence and professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers

Group	Samples	N	r	SE _r	Sig.	r _{POP}	
						.05 level	.01 level
Whole Group	Total	627	0.581	0.026	.001	0.53-0.63	0.51-0.65
Gender	Male	167	0.704	0.039	.001	0.63-0.78	0.60-0.80
	Female	460	0.520	0.034	.001	0.45-0.59	0.43-0.61
Educational Qualification	DHT	324	0.523	0.040	.001	0.44-0.60	0.42-0.63
	TGT	212	0.588	0.045	.001	0.50-0.68	0.47-0.70
	TPT	91	0.740	0.047	.001	0.65-0.83	0.62-0.86
Type of School	Govt.	259	0.558	0.043	.001	0.47-0.64	0.45-0.67
	Aided	285	0.586	0.039	.001	0.51-0.66	0.49-0.69
	Unaided	83	0.575	0.073	.001	0.43-0.72	0.39-0.76
Service Experience	High	131	0.643	0.051	.001	0.54-0.74	0.51-0.77
	Average	355	0.527	0.038	.001	0.45-0.60	0.43-0.63
	Low	141	0.615	0.052	.001	0.51-0.72	0.48-0.75

DHT: Diploma Holding Teachers, TGR: Trained Graduate Teachers, TPT: Trained Postgraduate Teachers

Table 2: Comparison of the relationship between PE and SI of sub-samples of elementary school teachers

Group		Subgroups	Statistical Indices			Z _{observed}	Sig.
			N	R	Z		
Gender		Male	167	0.704	0.867	3.281	.001
		Female	460	0.520	0.576		
Educational Qualification	1	DHT	324	0.523	0.576	1.059	NS
		TGT	212	0.588	0.663		
	2	DHT	324	0.523	0.576	3.075	.001
		TPT	91	0.740	0.915		
	3	TGT	212	0.588	0.663	2.171	.05
		TPT	91	0.740	0.915		
Type of school management	1	Govt.	259	0.558	0.633	0.035	NS
		Aided	285	0.586	0.678		
	2	Govt.	259	0.558	0.633	0.153	NS
		Unaided	83	0.575	0.662		
	3	Aided	285	0.586	0.678	0.131	NS
		Unaided	83	0.575	0.662		
Service Experience	1	High	131	0.643	0.758	1.718	NS
		Average	355	0.527	0.590		
	2	High	131	0.643	0.758	0.378	NS
		Low	141	0.615	0.725		
	3	Average	355	0.527	0.590	1.304	NS
		Low	141	0.615	0.725		

Further analysis across subgroups indicates that the magnitude of this relationship varies according to certain personal and professional attributes. The relatively stronger association identified among male teachers and trained postgraduate teachers may be attributed to differences in academic preparation, communicative confidence, and exposure to collaborative professional environments. Comparable trends have been noted in recent studies emphasizing the contribution of advanced training to the effective utilization of social intelligence in educational contexts (Karacabey & Adlim, 2025) ^[7]. In contrast, the lack of significant variation across school management categories and levels of teaching experience suggests that social intelligence functions as a broadly consistent professional resource, irrespective of institutional context. Collectively, these findings highlight the need to intentionally integrate the development of social intelligence into teacher education programmers and ongoing professional development initiatives to strengthen teachers' professional effectiveness.

Conclusions

The findings of the study clearly indicate that social intelligence plays a meaningful role in shaping the professional effectiveness of elementary school teachers in Kerala. Educators who possess stronger capacities for social awareness, interpersonal insight, and flexible social adjustment tend to perform more effectively in areas such as instructional planning, classroom leadership, professional collaboration, and overall teaching practice. The association between social intelligence and professional effectiveness was consistently positive and statistically significant not only for the entire sample but also across all subgroups examined, highlighting the broad relevance of social intelligence in the professional lives of teachers. Moreover, variations in the strength of this association were evident across selected demographic characteristics. Gender and level of educational qualification were found to influence the magnitude of the relationship, with comparatively stronger associations observed among male teachers and those holding postgraduate professional qualifications. Conversely, differences related to school management type and length of teaching experience did not exert a significant influence, indicating that social intelligence operates as a relatively enduring professional characteristic across different institutional settings and stages of service. Collectively, these results emphasize the importance of social intelligence as a vital socio-emotional competency that underpins effective teaching practice.

Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the study, it is suggested that programmers for teacher preparation place greater emphasis on the systematic development of social intelligence. Core elements such as effective interpersonal communication, empathy, management of interpersonal conflict, and cooperative problem-solving should be purposefully embedded within teacher education curricula. Pre-service training may be strengthened through the inclusion of activity-based learning strategies, including collaborative tasks, simulated classroom situations, reflective journaling, and guided group interactions, to foster socio-emotional competencies alongside instructional knowledge. With regard to practicing teachers, ongoing professional

development programmers should incorporate targeted training sessions designed to enhance social intelligence, thereby supporting improved classroom dynamics and productive professional relationships. Educational leaders and policy planners may also consider recognizing social intelligence as an important dimension within teacher evaluation and professional advancement systems. In addition, future investigations could build on the present study by adopting longitudinal or experimental approaches to establish causal relationships and to examine how social intelligence interacts with other non-cognitive factors in shaping teachers' professional effectiveness.

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