



Exploring Elementary Teacher's Understanding and Classroom Practices in Fostering Students' Emotional Intelligence in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This study explores elementary school teachers' understanding of emotional intelligence (EI), their classroom practices for fostering students' EI, and the perceived benefits and challenges within the educational context of Myanmar. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve elementary teachers from public, private, and community schools across six regions and analysed thematically using Goleman's five components of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The findings indicate that teachers possess a meaningful but partial understanding of EI, primarily emphasizing emotional awareness, regulation, and interpersonal relationships, while motivation and empathy were not consistently recognized as distinct components. Teachers nevertheless implemented diverse EI-oriented practices, including integrating emotional learning into academic lessons, encouraging self-expression, promoting cooperative learning, establishing behavioural expectations, and using positive communication. These practices were perceived to contribute to improvements in students' behaviour, learning motivation, social interaction, and cognitive engagement, as well as to stronger teacher-student relationships and improved classroom management. However, teachers faced challenges such as limited instructional time, lack of formal EI training, political instability, and scarce educational resources. In conclusion, fostering emotional intelligence in Myanmar elementary classrooms is essential for students' holistic development and teachers' professional effectiveness in current contexts.

Pendahuluan

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been widely recognized as one of the influential factors in students' learning processes, particularly in early childhood and primary education. For primary school students, the classroom represents a new and often unfamiliar environment in which they must learn to adapt to academic demands, regulate their emotions, and cooperate with peers (Moss et al., 2024). Emotional intelligence enables students to manage their emotions effectively, improve social interactions, and build positive peer relationships, defined emotional intelligence as the capacity to recognise one's own feelings and those of others, to motivate oneself, and to manage emotions effectively in both personal and interpersonal contexts (Erasmus et al., 2022).

Accordingly, how students understand and regulate their emotions plays a critical role in shaping their classroom behaviours and learning engagement. Therefore, primary school teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic content but also for supporting students' emotional development. Teachers function as key socializers who provide experiences that promote students' social-emotional competencies and

psychological adjustment. The emotional intelligence of teachers themselves is also crucial. Teachers need not only to possess emotional intelligence but also to embed emotional support into their daily classroom practices to foster students' EI. Numerous studies have demonstrated that teachers' emotional competence positively influences students' well-being, classroom climate, and academic performance (Halimi et al., 2021; Ma & Niu, 2025).

Consequently, primary school teachers are expected to adopt effective strategies that integrate emotional development within academic instruction. This study is guided by two central research questions that address both conceptual understanding and pedagogical practice related to emotional intelligence in primary education in Myanmar. First, it examines how primary school teachers in Myanmar conceptualise and understand emotional intelligence, including the meanings, dimensions, and importance they attribute to EI in teaching and learning. Second, it investigates the classroom practices these teachers employ to foster students' emotional intelligence, focusing on strategies, instructional activities, and interactional approaches that support students' emotional awareness, regulation, and social competence. By addressing these interconnected questions, the study seeks to provide an integrated understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices concerning emotional intelligence in primary school classrooms (Serhal et al., 2018; Wang, 2023).

Emotional intelligence was first conceptualised by Mayer et al., (2016), as a subset of social intelligence involving the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, discriminate among them, and use emotional information to guide thinking and action. Expanding on this definition, broadened the construct to include emotional awareness, motivation, and emotional regulation in oneself and in relationships. The operationalised emotional intelligence into five interrelated components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. This framework has been widely adopted in educational research because it provides a practical and systematic lens for examining emotional competencies that are observable, developable, and applicable in classroom contexts. Through this model, emotional intelligence can be translated into teachable skills and instructional strategies that support students' social, emotional, and academic development. A growing body of research has confirmed the positive impact of emotional intelligence on students' academic success and holistic development. Emotional intelligence is increasingly regarded as a critical factor in fostering positive learning environments where both teachers and students can achieve educational goals. In line with holistic educational approaches, EI practices have been integrated into teaching and learning processes to support students not only academically but also socially and emotionally (Glasgow et al., 2020; Ibrahimov, 2025).

Across Southeast Asia, studies indicate that higher emotional intelligence is associated with better academic performance. In Indonesia, Halimi et al., (2021), conducted a quantitative study with tenth-grade students to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement. The findings revealed that students with higher levels of EI demonstrated better academic outcomes and greater emotional control, which supported their learning performance. However, this and similar studies primarily focus on the relationship between EI and academic achievement, offering limited insight into everyday classroom practices that naturally foster students' emotional intelligence. Beyond academic outcomes, emotional intelligence has also been linked to reduced behavioural problems. Foën et al., (2016), in a study conducted among Malaysian secondary school students, found that lower levels of emotional intelligence were associated with higher levels of stress, depression, and somatic complaints. Conversely, students with higher EI exhibited fewer behavioural issues and greater emotional regulation when faced with challenging situations. Collectively, these findings suggest that emotional intelligence contributes to students' resilience, mental health, social skills, motivation, and academic performance. Nevertheless, there remains limited research on how daily classroom practices can effectively nurture emotional intelligence within regular classroom settings, particularly in primary education (Dearing & Larson, 2025).

Given this gap, increasing attention has been directed toward teachers' roles in fostering emotional intelligence through classroom practices. Studies indicate that teachers with high emotional intelligence contribute positively to supportive classroom climates, effective behaviour management, and improved student academic outcomes. Loop & Roskam (2016), emphasised that teachers significantly influence children's emotional development through modelling, coaching, and conditioned responses. Teachers convey both intentional and unintentional messages about emotional expression and regulation through their behaviour, communication styles, and responses to students' emotions. They also promote emotional

awareness by explicitly discussing emotions in specific situations and highlighting the consequences of emotional responses (Jackson et al., 2023).

In addition to teachers' interpersonal behaviours, structured learning activities have been found to support emotional intelligence development. For instance, outdoor learning activities in elementary schools have been shown to foster self-awareness, empathy, and collaboration among students (Ahmad et al., 2025). Similarly, research conducted in Indonesian elementary schools found that Islamic Education teachers employed various strategies to nurture students' emotional intelligence by emphasising students' attitudes and participation in spiritual and social activities. These included regular recitations, prayer activities, social service projects, group learning techniques, and extracurricular programmes designed to strengthen cooperation and interpersonal relationships. While such studies provide valuable insights, many were conducted in structured or controlled environments, leaving a need for research that examines emotional intelligence practices embedded in everyday classroom instruction, particularly in under-researched contexts such as Myanmar.

Metode

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore teachers' understanding of emotional intelligence (EI) and their lived experiences in fostering EI through daily classroom practices. A phenomenological approach is appropriate for examining how individuals perceive, interpret, and make meaning of a particular phenomenon within their professional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on teachers' subjective experiences, this design allowed for an in-depth exploration of how EI is understood and enacted in primary classroom settings. The phenomenological method emphasises capturing participants' perspectives as they are experienced in real-life situations. In this study, it enabled the researcher to understand how teachers conceptualise emotional intelligence and how these conceptualisations influence their classroom practices. This approach also facilitated the identification of common meanings and shared experiences among teachers regarding the integration of EI into everyday teaching and learning processes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions to elicit teachers' views, beliefs, and classroom practices related to emotional intelligence. Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research to explore participants' experiences, behaviours, and the rationale underlying their actions. This method provides rich and detailed data, as participants are able to elaborate on their responses and clarify meanings. Additionally, interviews allow researchers to build rapport with participants, leading to deeper insights into their thoughts and feelings. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain nuanced insights into how teachers understand emotional intelligence and how they foster students' EI through daily classroom practices.

Hasil dan Pembahasan

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the conceptual understanding of teachers on EI, their classroom practices to enhance students' EI, its impacts on students' academic success and teachers' challenges in implementing EI in classroom settings. When EI classroom practices were conducted, their attitudes towards EI and their perceived benefits in terms of teachers' perspectives and students' perspectives were explored respectively. Therefore, this study is believed to provide authentic perspectives and practical experiences of teachers regarding EI and its implementation. Collaboratively, the deeper insights of Myanmar elementary teachers' experiences in implementing EI in daily classrooms can be understood.

Based on the research questions and the analysis of interview data, this study organises its findings into two main analytical categories. The first category, teachers' conceptual understanding of emotional intelligence, focuses on how teachers define, interpret, and make sense of emotional intelligence within their professional roles, including their perceptions of its relevance to teaching and learning. The second category, classroom practices for nurturing emotional intelligence, examines the attitudes, instructional practices, and perceived benefits associated with teachers' efforts to foster students' emotional development in classroom settings. Together, these two categories provide a coherent framework for presenting the findings and for capturing both the cognitive and practical dimensions of teachers' engagement with emotional intelligence.

Teachers' Conceptual Understanding of Emotional Intelligence

Goleman (2017), defined emotional intelligence as the capacity to recognise one's own feelings and those of others, to motivate oneself, and to manage emotions effectively in both personal and interpersonal contexts. According to Goleman, emotional intelligence consists of five core components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals perceive, manage, and utilise emotions in everyday interactions. In the context of education, this framework is particularly relevant because emotional competencies directly influence students' learning behaviours, social relationships, and overall classroom engagement. In this study, elementary school teachers' conceptual understanding of emotional intelligence was explored through open-ended interview questions that invited them to describe their own interpretations of EI. The participating teachers generally conceptualised emotional intelligence as an individual's ability to recognise and understand their own emotions, regulate emotional responses in socially acceptable ways, and remain sensitive to the emotions of others.

Teachers emphasised that emotional awareness and regulation are essential skills for both students and teachers, particularly in classroom environments that require cooperation, patience, and emotional control. Furthermore, the teachers believed that emotional intelligence plays a significant role in shaping students' cognitive processes and learning experiences. They noted that students' emotional states influence key aspects of learning, such as memory, attention, concentration, and interest in school lessons. According to the participants, students who are able to manage their emotions effectively are more likely to stay focused, participate actively in class, and respond positively to learning challenges. Thus, teachers viewed emotional intelligence not only as a social or emotional skill but also as a critical foundation for effective learning and academic development in elementary education.

- **Classroom Practices for Nurturing Emotional Intelligence**

The findings indicate that Myanmar elementary school teachers implemented a wide range of classroom practices to nurture students' emotional intelligence through both informal interactions and daily instructional activities. Teachers' practices were explored through five guiding questions developed based on Goleman's emotional intelligence framework. The results demonstrate that, although teachers did not always explicitly label their practices as emotional intelligence instruction, they consistently integrated EI-related strategies into routine classroom teaching and interactions with students.

- **Self-Awareness**

Regarding self-awareness, the findings revealed that teachers employed four main practices to help students recognise and understand their own emotions. First, teachers encouraged self-expression by allowing students to share their feelings, opinions, and personal experiences during class discussions. This practice helped students become more aware of their emotional states and learn to articulate them appropriately. Second, teachers integrated emotional topics into academic lessons by using stories, examples, or real-life situations that highlighted emotions and personal experiences. Third, some teachers directly explained concepts related to emotional intelligence and social interaction, helping students understand different emotions and their effects on behaviour. Finally, teachers promoted social interaction through group activities and peer discussions, which enabled students to reflect on their own emotions in relation to others and develop greater emotional awareness.

- **Self-Regulation**

In fostering self-regulation, teachers reported using three primary strategies: behaviour modification, character development, and the establishment of rules and responsibilities. For behaviour modification, teachers guided students to manage their emotions by discussing the causes and consequences of their actions and by intentionally listening to students' problems and concerns. When problematic behaviours occurred, teachers applied corrective measures such as verbal warnings, written reflections, signing as a form of punishment, and informing responsible persons. These approaches were intended not only to address misbehaviour but also to help students reflect on their emotional responses and develop better emotional control. In addition, teachers emphasised character development by teaching moral values and positive character traits, such as patience, respect, and self-discipline. Teachers also highlighted the importance of clearly and logically setting classroom rules, noting that consistent routines and systems such as turn-taking supported students in regulating their emotions and behaviours and maintaining discipline.

- **Motivation**

Teachers identified motivation as a central element of both students' academic success and personal development. To enhance students' motivation, they implemented various strategies, including encouragement, inspiration, imitation, and active teaching-learning approaches. Teachers encouraged students by acknowledging their ideas, accepting their opinions, and recognising their achievements, which helped build students' confidence and willingness to participate. They also used expressive body language, gestures, and tone of voice to capture students' interest and inspire enthusiasm for learning. Teachers noted that the way lessons were introduced significantly influenced students' motivation, with engaging introductions helping to sustain attention and curiosity. Moreover, interactive teaching and learning strategies were among the most commonly reported practices, such as integrating songs, poems, stories, and games into lessons, using interactive teaching methods, and actively involving students through questioning and participation in classroom activities. These strategies were perceived as effective in maintaining students' motivation while simultaneously supporting their emotional engagement in the learning process.

- **Empathy**

According to the results, students' empathy was nurtured through three main classroom practices: rule formulation, lesson integration, and practical application. First, teachers reported that they established classroom rules designed to promote helping behaviours and sharing among students. By encouraging students to assist one another and share resources or responsibilities, teachers aimed to cultivate an understanding of empathy as an essential social value. These rules provided students with clear expectations for cooperative behaviour and helped them practice recognising and responding to the needs and feelings of their peers, thereby reinforcing empathetic interactions in daily classroom life.

Second, lesson integration was identified as a key strategy for fostering empathy. Teachers deliberately incorporated discussions and examples related to compassion, kindness, and consideration for others into the academic content. For instance, in subjects such as social studies or religious education, teachers highlighted moral stories, religious references, and historical examples that illustrated empathetic behaviours. Embedding these concepts into lessons allowed students to make connections between abstract ideas of empathy and practical, observable behaviours, enhancing their understanding of how empathy applies in real-life contexts.

Finally, practical application provided students with opportunities to exercise empathy in structured and meaningful ways. Teachers described initiatives such as monthly school themes or class projects in which students were encouraged to support and help one another, collaborate on group tasks, or respond to peers' needs during classroom activities. These experiences offered hands-on learning opportunities for students to apply empathetic skills, practice perspective-taking, and develop sensitivity toward others' emotions. Through these combined strategies—rule formulation, lesson integration, and practical application—teachers systematically promoted the growth of students' empathy, helping them become more socially aware, compassionate, and emotionally intelligent in their interactions with classmates.

- **Social Skills**

The findings revealed that teachers actively fostered students' social skills by providing responsibilities, creating opportunities for collaboration, and organising structured group work. Assigning classroom responsibilities, such as leading activities, managing classroom materials, or supporting peers in various tasks, was reported by teachers to enhance students' communication, cooperation, and leadership abilities. These responsibilities encouraged students to interact positively with their classmates, negotiate roles, and solve problems collectively, thereby strengthening their interpersonal competencies.

In addition, teachers emphasised collaborative learning as a central strategy for nurturing social skills. By engaging students in group activities, projects, and team-based tasks, teachers created a classroom environment in which cooperation, mutual respect, and effective communication were practiced regularly. Through these interactions, students learned to listen actively, express their opinions respectfully, and respond appropriately to others' perspectives, which are fundamental components of social competence. Organising group work also enabled students to develop negotiation, conflict resolution, and empathy skills, as they navigated differences and worked toward common goals with their peers.

Overall, the study indicates that teachers across community, public, and private schools in Myanmar nurtured students' emotional intelligence primarily through everyday classroom interactions rather than through formal programs or specialised EI curricula. Although the specific techniques and areas of emphasis varied among teachers, all participants shared a commitment to fostering students' emotional and social development. Their practices collectively contributed to students' holistic growth, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions, and underscored the crucial role of teachers in integrating emotional intelligence into daily teaching and learning experiences.

Furthermore, Findings from this study provide valuable insights into how Myanmar elementary school teachers conceptualize emotional intelligence (EI) and apply related practices in their classrooms to enhance students' emotional competencies, even though they have not received formal training in social and emotional learning programs. By examining teachers' experiences and practices, this study highlights the ways in which teachers intuitively integrate EI into their daily teaching routines. Additionally, the perceived benefits of fostering EI for both teachers and students were explored to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of these practices. The discussion of these findings is integrated with existing literature to interpret not only the specific classroom strategies teachers implemented but also the benefits they observed and the challenges they encountered in promoting emotional intelligence within the primary school context.

When teachers' conceptual understanding of EI was examined, the findings revealed a strong alignment with Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, which outlines five core components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Specifically, the teachers in this study demonstrated an understanding of three of these components: self-awareness, self-regulation, and awareness of others' emotions, which aligns with social skills. Teachers emphasized the importance of recognising and managing their own emotions, as well as being sensitive to students' emotional states. This understanding influenced the ways they approached classroom interactions and informed their decisions on how to support students' emotional and social development.

Building on this conceptual understanding, the study examined the specific classroom practices teachers used to nurture students' emotional intelligence. Despite the absence of formal EI training programs, Myanmar elementary teachers implemented a variety of strategies across all five components of Goleman's framework, including fostering self-awareness, promoting self-regulation, enhancing motivation, cultivating empathy, and developing social skills. Many of these practices were consistent with strategies identified in previous research on EI development in educational settings, such as encouraging self-expression, integrating emotional concepts into lessons, guiding behaviour and character development, using interactive teaching methods, and providing opportunities for collaboration. At the same time, some unique practices were observed, reflecting the influence of cultural values, school contexts, and individual teacher creativity in adapting EI strategies to their classrooms.

In conclusion, this study highlights that Myanmar elementary teachers, despite lacking formal training in EI programs, demonstrated a partial but practical conceptual understanding of emotional intelligence and implemented multiple strategies to foster students' EI, which closely align with existing research in both theory and practice. These strategies were found to contribute positively to students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as to teachers' classroom management and job satisfaction. However, the study also identified challenges that teachers face in implementing EI practices consistently, including limited instructional time, insufficient formal guidance, and contextual constraints related to resources and school environments. Therefore, the findings underscore the need for additional support, such as systematic teacher training and policy initiatives, to enable teachers to implement EI practices in a more structured, intentional, and sustainable manner, ultimately enhancing both student outcomes and teachers' professional effectiveness.

Kesimpulan

This study aimed to explore Myanmar elementary teachers' conceptual understanding of emotional intelligence (EI), their classroom practices to enhance students' EI, and the perceived benefits and challenges of implementing EI in daily classroom activities. The findings revealed that teachers understood EI as the ability to recognize and regulate one's own emotions, understand others' emotions, and build healthy interpersonal relationships. This understanding aligns closely with Goleman's EI theory, which includes five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. However, teachers did not explicitly recognize motivation and empathy as distinct components, indicating that their understanding is partial rather than comprehensive. Teachers also believed that EI is closely connected to students' cognitive and learning development, supporting improvements in memory, attention, and concentration.

The study found that teachers implemented a variety of classroom practices to foster students' EI, reflecting Goleman's five components. Practices to develop self-awareness included encouraging self-expression, integrating EI concepts into lessons, directly explaining EI, and promoting social interaction. Self-regulation was fostered through behaviour modification, character development, and setting clear rules and responsibilities. Motivation was enhanced using encouragement, inspiration, imitation, and active teaching-learning techniques. Empathy was nurtured through rule formulation, lesson integration, and practical application, while social skills were developed by assigning responsibilities, promoting collaboration, and organizing group work. These strategies illustrate how teachers incorporated EI-fostering practices into daily classroom routines in meaningful and contextually relevant ways.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that Myanmar elementary teachers, despite the lack of formal EI training, possess a meaningful yet partial understanding of emotional intelligence and actively implement diverse strategies to enhance students' EI. Their classroom practices contribute to students' social, emotional, and cognitive development, highlighting the critical role of teachers in creating supportive and emotionally engaging learning environments. These findings suggest the need for additional support and structured training to enable teachers to implement EI practices more systematically and consistently.

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