

Research paper

Emotional Awareness: Gender Differences and Relationships with Age and Teaching Experience

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Abstract

One of the most important features that teachers need in order to play an effective role in the teaching process and communication is emotional awareness. Emotional awareness influences teacher-student interactions and shapes the classroom atmosphere and language-teaching context. This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between teachers' age, gender, and years of experience and their level of emotional awareness based on a developed and validated scale for language teachers. To do so, 264 EFL language teachers and lecturers completed the demographic data section as well as the validated emotional awareness section of the self-report questionnaire. The analysis of the data revealed that there is a significant relationship between age and emotional awareness. Also, there is a significant difference among the mean scores of emotional awareness for different years of experience. An independent-samples t-test was run to compare the scores of male and female students in emotional awareness, which showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of males' and females' emotional awareness. The findings of the study can have implications for scholars in the field of language education by highlighting the importance of considering both age and gender factors in understanding emotional awareness.

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Introduction

Emotional awareness plays a significant role in teaching efficacy and increasing performance at teacher's work site. Paying attention to emotions within the classroom setting empowers

both students and teachers (Zohoorian et al., 2023) to regulate their emotions and offers valuable strategies to address challenges that may hinder effectiveness. Limited research has been conducted on the impact of emotions on instructors, with the majority of studies focusing on learners.

Outcomes of previous studies commonly revealed positive impacts among them such as expanded recognition of the significance of emotion in the context of schools (Maree & Mokhuane, 2007); increased utilization of emotional knowledge for both instructors' feelings and their students in lesson plans and in the classroom environment (Brackett et al., 2006); improved instructors' sensitivity to learners' emotions in various situations (Brackett et al., 2007); and enhanced skills to react constructively to students' social-emotional necessities (Brackett et al., 2009).

Yet, emotional awareness has been so crucial that its inclusion is even emphasized in teacher training and professional development (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014). There are also other factors that merit attention as emotional awareness is concerned. It has been noted by Blanchard-Fields (2007) that as aging can lead to more adaptive behavior; thus, it can have effects on one's emotional adaptation and functioning (Kashdan et al., 2015). Teaching experience can then be an effective factor determining one's emotional awareness. In the same vein, it is highlighted that gender can be a determining factor for understanding emotional awareness (Brants, 2019). Accordingly, the present study sought to find the relations of teaching experience and gender with emotional awareness in the context of language teaching.

The research questions of the study are as follows.

Q1. Is there any significant relationship between language teachers' age and emotional awareness?

Q2. Is there any significant relationship between language teachers' gender and emotional awareness?

Review of Literature

Emotional awareness has been conceptually defined in various ways. According to Davis et al. (2017), it involves the ability to identify, label, and understand the antecedences and consequences of emotions. Monti and Rudolph (2014) define it as the ability to identify and label one's emotions in order to express them. Rieffe et al. (2008) describe emotional awareness as an attentional process require to interpret and evaluate the purpose of emotions. While some researchers have focused on internal self-emotional awareness, Lane and Schwartz (1987) and Lane et al. (1990) highlight that individuals also differ in their abilities to identify, label, and understand the emotional experiences of others. Van Beveren et al. (2019) define emotional awareness as the skills to identify, explain, and discern the emotional experiences of the self and others. Similarly, Ciarrochi et al. (200) and Lane et al. (2000) emphasize the ability to recognize and describe emotions in oneself and others. in the context of the present study, the focus is on the level of emotional awareness of language teachers toward their students in the classroom.

The emotional awareness theory was initially introduced by Lane and Schwartz in 1987. They defined it as the ability of recognition and description of one's and others' emotions. Their theory followed a similar line of discussion as was presented by Piaget and they applied Piaget's views in their framework ([Lane & Schwartz, 1987](#)). One of the basic principles of the model related to the idea of emotional awareness as an individual difference trait. [Lane and Schwartz \(1987\)](#) highlighted that individuals benefit a different level of differentiation in order to process emotional information which they perceive either from internal sources or external sources. The emotional awareness model presents five levels for this trait in a continuum containing undifferentiated states at one end and more integrated states at the other end. The first level includes an awareness of physical sensations. The second level relates to action tendencies which follows to the third level that is single emotions. The fourth and fifth levels include the integrated levels of blending motions and blending of blends of emotional experience (Lane & Smith, 2021).

Based on the model, levels are exclusive with regard to the momentary states of an individual. Thus, each of the levels comprises of special features such as the subjectivity quality, differentiation degree, or description ability as well as differentiation level of others. Accordingly, every level has consistency and permanence and each can relate to individuals' function at or near a level ([Versluis et al. 2021](#)). A more recent approach toward the model includes viewing it as a social-emotional skill (Lane & Smith, 2021). It has been noted that while a child develops the emotional repertoire, environmental and contextual factors can help in understating emotions (Widen & Russell, 2008). Once an individual has an awareness of emotional states, it is expected of him or her to move toward an anticipation as well as adaptation to the challenges happening in the external world rather than just rely on the "automatic affective responses" (Lane & Smith, 2021). In the same vein, Allen et al. (2015) have considered the theory supportive of managing others' emotions specifically in social situations.

Many studies have used this theory to study emotions and emotion awareness in different contexts and a variety of relational situations and for different age groups and among healthy and unhealthy individuals (Agnoli, et al., 2019; Maroti, et al., 2018; Schlegel, 2020; Veirman, et al., 2011). While the theory gains ideas from Piaget's view pertaining to children's development, a notable consistency is observable in employing the model for both children and adults (Schlegel & Scherer, 2018). However, it has been advised by Lane and Smith (2021) that the model needs to be improved based on the initial insights given as the measure relies on a performance-based model and many more studies are needed to introduce novel measures in the realm of emotion understanding or awareness while considering its implications as a social-emotional skill.

The identification of emotions is widely recognized as a fundamental component of emotional awareness. Scholars have theorized that the ability to label specific emotional states serves as the basis for higher levels of emotional awareness (Ciarrochi, et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2017; Gohm & Clore, 2002; Lane & Schwartz, 1987; Monti & Rudolph, 2014). This notion

is supported by research indicating that identifying emotions is a core dimension of emotional awareness.

While there is a significant lack of research on the relationship between self-emotional awareness (specifically the ability to identify one's own emotions) and the perception of emotional expressions in others, some studies have shed light on this topic. Ekman and Cordaro (2011) have established that basic emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and happiness are universally recognizable across cultures. Individuals can accurately perceive these emotions and match them to corresponding facial expressions (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011; Lindquist et al., 2014). For instance, a smile is commonly associated with happiness, while a scowl indicates anger. However, it is worth considering the concepts of emotional clarity, granularity, and differentiation when perceiving more specific or discrete emotional displays. This includes recognizing that a smile can represent the broader category of happiness or more nuanced aspects such as joy, pride, or elation. The identification of emotions also plays a role in how individuals perceive and sense what may be wrong with others (Stein, 2009).

Within the principal domain of emotional awareness, numerous researchers (Bagby, et al., 2006; Lane & Schwartz, 1987; Lane et al., 1990) have referred to certain aspects of emotional experience as possible factors that can influence the general ability of identifying and describing emotions. It has been suggested that because emotions also have a physical or somatic sensation representation associated with them, individuals need to first be able to attend to these physical variations to associate felt feelings with specific emotions. Moreover, the frequency or strength of somatic reactions can contribute to an individual's deciphering of a particular emotional experience, or even in case of multiple emotions happening simultaneously (Bagby et al., 2006). According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), "emotional awareness represents students' thinking about how they know they experience an emotion" (p.40). It has also been noted by Purushothaman (2021) that "The ability to be aware of the emotions being experienced at all times is emotional awareness. Once this awareness is gained, we could make effective choices" (p.55)

Emotional awareness can change based on aging. Ready et al. (2008) have suggested that emotion differentiation can happen due to aging. Older adults have had more diverse learning experiences related to emotions. It can be assumed that as one ages, the person has more opportunities to exercise identifying, naming, and even expressing the nature and source of emotions (Mankus, et al., 2016). Research on socio-emotional selectivity theory (Scheibe & Carstensen, 2010) suggests that aging includes the prioritization of socially and emotionally meaningful goals; thus, the person becomes more selective about situations and people and in relation to oneself. Moreover, it is well accepted that aging will promote adaptive patterns of emotional processing (Blanchard-Fields, 2007) and it can lead to more adaptive psychological and emotional functioning (Kashdan et al., 2015). Concerning age and emotional awareness, Nandrino, et al. (2013) revealed contradictory results and maintained that a higher emotional level was observed in younger age groups. However, the justification that was given related to their cultural context as well as generational societal teachings. Agnoli, et al. (2019) also found

a relationship between age and emotional awareness. However, in their model they referred to an indirect impact of age on emotional awareness through the participants' intelligence. Age has also been studied in relation to processing emotions and emotion experience through neurobiological studies. It has been noted by Neiss, et al. (2009) that a significant difference was observed in different age groups in recognition of pictures and in relation to emotional experiencing.

Existing research shows that emotional experiences vary by gender. However, many of these differences are due to cultural factors. For example, women are stereotyped in Western culture as more emotionally expressive and emotionally competent and more emotionally intense than men (Brody & Hall, 2008). According to Mankus, et al. (2016) study "gender was associated with all facets but type clarity, with higher source clarity, negative emotion differentiation, voluntary attention, and involuntary attention reported by women than men" (p.1). Other researchers including Nandrino, et al. (2013) found differences in emotional awareness in terms of participants' gender. Even in children, it has been posited that age can be a determining factor in the level of emotional awareness (Bajgar, et al. 2005). Gender can even be considered as a pivotal factor in the interpretations of emotions and thus in accordance with emotional awareness (Brants, 2019). Pertaining to gender effects on emotional awareness, many studies indicate a clear advantage for females (Lambie, et al., 2016). Another study referred to adults as advantageous in terms of having a higher level of emotional awareness (Van Beveren, et al., 2019).

As the literature informs us, the studies which have focused on age or gender (Mankus, et al., 2016; Nandrino, et al. 2013) in relation to emotional awareness have mainly considered a general context or among specific populations. Thus, there is lack of research in determining such relationships based on teaching experience or gender in language teaching/learning contexts.

Methods

The present study included a correlation analysis to find the relationship between emotional awareness and age and years of experience. Moreover, it employed a comparative design to find if there is any statistically significant difference in terms of gender.

Participants

A number of 264 EFL language teachers and lecturers participated in the present study of both genders (male=82 and female=181). Cohen (1992) recommends a minimum of 100 participants for a correlational study. In addition, Hair, et al (2019) discusses that a number of 200 is necessary to achieve sufficient power for effect sizes. Their years of teaching experience ranged from 1-5 years (123), 5-10 years (88), to over 10 years (52). They had their degrees in several fields related to English language teaching such as language teaching (151), English translation (44), English literature (52), and linguistics (13), and unrelated fields (3).

Instrumentations

The demographic data of the participants were gathered through a self-report questionnaire including their age, years of teaching experience, as well as gender. Moreover, Kamali's language teachers' emotional awareness questionnaire (2023) was employed which was validated and whose reliability was calculated as 0.86. The validation process included face and content validity as well as construct validity through the conduct of exploratory factor analysis. The emotional awareness questionnaire had four sub constructs including internal emotional awareness, emotional labelling, external emotional awareness, and emotional identification. Internal emotional Awareness included 6 items, Emotional Labelling included 6 items, External emotional Awareness included 6 items, and Emotional identification included 4 items.

Results

In order to analyze data SPSS version 25 was employed. To find relationships, Pearson correlation was run and to find different in terms of gender, T-test was used. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, variances, minimum, and maximum for the Emotional awareness in the study.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the tests used in the study

	Emotional awareness
Mean	174.3954
Median	171.0000
Mode	154.00a
Std. Deviation	22.57091
Variance	509.446
Range	127.00
Minimum	113.00
Maximum	240.00

The study conducted a check on the normality of the distributions of the tests used. To assess this, skewness and kurtosis values, along with their standard errors (SE), were calculated. Skewness measures the degree to which a distribution deviates from symmetry around the mean, while kurtosis indicates the "peakedness" or "flatness" of a distribution. A skewness or kurtosis value of zero suggests a perfectly normal distribution. However, values between ± 1 are considered "very good," and values between ± 2 are deemed acceptable (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995).

Table 2 displays the values for the tests, which fall within the "very good" range (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995). Based on this, we can assume that the distributions of the emotional awareness scores in the study are normal.

Table 2*Test of normality for the measures used in the study*

	Emotional awareness
Skewness	.37
Std. Error of Skewness	.15
Kurtosis	-.37
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.29

As Table 3 shows, based on the Pearson correlation, the correlation between age and emotional awareness is small ($r=.22$) but it is significant at the .01 level, so we can conclude that there is a significant relationship between age and emotional awareness.

Table 3*Correlation between Age and Emotional Awareness*

	Age
Emotional awareness	.22**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the means for the participants with different years of experience. A one-way analysis of variance was run to compare the means of the three groups.

Table 4*Descriptive statistics for Years of Experience*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum
1-5years	123	169.6585	17.68153	1.59429	135.00	214.00
5-10 years	88	179.8182	23.95136	2.55322	113.00	240.00
Over 10 years	52	176.4231	27.95749	3.87701	125.00	232.00
Total	263	174.3954	22.57091	1.39178	113.00	240.00

According to Table 5 as the p value is less than .05, (sig= .004) there is a significant difference among the mean scores of emotional awareness for different years of experience.

Table 5*ANOVA for years of experience*

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sg.
total					
Between Groups	5561.433	2	2780.71	5.652	.004
Within Groups	127913.442	260	491.975		
Total	133474.875	262			

An independent-samples t-test was also run to compare the scores of males and females in emotional awareness test. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for males and females on the emotional awareness scale.

Table 6
Group Statistics for Males and Females

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
gender	female	181	172.4586	21.44903	1.59429
total	male	82	178.6707	24.46618	2.70184

According to Table 7, as all the sig value is less .05 (Sig= .03), there is statistically significant difference in the mean scores of males' and females' emotional awareness.

Table 7
T-tests for Comparing Males and Females

		t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
total	Equal variances assumed	-2.081	261	.038	-6.21217	2.98565
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.980	139.611	.050	-6.21217	3.13715

Discussion

This study was conducted to find the relationships between emotional awareness with age and years of experience. The target context where emotional awareness was measured was the language classroom. Based on the findings it was concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between age and emotional awareness. This finding is in line with other studies such as Mankus' et al. (2016) who found out that age was positively associated to emotional awareness. Within the past decade, researchers (Agnoli, et al., 2019; Maroti, et al., 2018; Schlegel, 2020; Veirman, et al., 2011) have found relationships between emotional awareness and age. While aging relates to developments in cognition, there is expectation of development in complications of emotion understanding (Bajgar, et al., 2011). Based on the literature review conducted by Seckman (2023) it was maintained that elders have a higher level of emotional stability as well as coping skills. This relationship may be various factors, including cognitive development, social experiences, and changes in emotional regulation strategies. Older adults often demonstrate greater emotional regulation skills, emotional stability, and a heightened ability to label and describe their own emotions.

It has been noted also that with aging, there is more prioritization of materials for reaching short-term goals rather than attending to the processing of undesirable materials (Löckenhoff & Carstensen, 2004). Similarly, Mankus et al. (2016) maintain that as individuals grow older,

they tend to more increasingly focus on their selection of the social and emotional environment. Thus, they can have greater mastery over their attention to emotions.

While one of the constructs of the emotional awareness variable in this study included emotional labeling, it has been highlighted by Davis et al. (2023) that “infants and young toddlers are less capable of labeling and describing their own emotions than are older children and adults.” (p.3) which is evidence of older individuals having a higher ability to label their feelings. As for the years of experience, it has been stressed by Shipley et al. (2010) that emotional intelligence which can also have emotional awareness as its sub-construct is positively associated with work experience.

Another finding of the study related to the significant difference in the mean scores of males’ and females’ emotional awareness. It is highlighted in literature also that there are gender differences in terms of experiencing emotions (Brody & Hall, 2008). Nandrino, et al. (2013) also confirmed that the level of emotional awareness could vary based on the person’s gender. Brants, et al. (2019) also stress the importance and impact of gender in interpreting emotions. To highlight the existing difference, Thompson, et al. (2009) also lists gender as a predictor in affective instability. Doktor, et al. (2018), focusing on prosocial behaviors, stresses that “Gender differences appeared in emotion awareness dimensions and prosocial behavior” (p.1). Tyler Boden and Berenbaum (2007) found no significant differences between male and female participants in terms of emotional awareness.

Unlike the findings of the current study, focusing on emotional intelligence, Agnoli et al. (2019) found out contrary results in relationship specific contexts. In their study, it was concluded that females had higher emotional intelligence scores. In the same vein, according to Croyle and Waltz (2002) who focused on emotional awareness, it was concluded that females are more aware in the context of relationships in response to situations and not in a general sense outside of the relationships. However, based on the study findings and the literature, it seems that gender differences in emotional awareness exist. These differences can be influenced by societal expectations, socialization processes, cultural norms, and potentially biological or neurological factors. Understanding the complex interplay between gender and emotional awareness is crucial for promoting emotional well-being and designing effective interventions as well as studying educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the relationships between emotional awareness, age and years of experience as well as gender in the language-teaching context. The findings revealed a positive and significant relationship between age and emotional awareness, which is consistent with previous research. Researchers have consistently found that as individuals grow older, they tend to have a greater mastery over their attention to emotions and prioritize materials that contribute to their short-term goals. Additionally, the study found a significant difference in the mean scores of emotional awareness between males and females, highlighting gender differences in experiencing and interpreting emotions. However, it is worth noting that some studies have found contrary results in specific relationship contexts, indicating that females

may have higher emotional intelligence scores or be more aware in the context of relationships. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of emotional awareness and its relationship with age and gender, providing insights that may inform interventions aimed at enhancing emotional awareness.

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