

# Investigation of Preschool Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Level

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**Abstract:**

Managing emotions is recognized as one of the teachers' most essential social and emotional competencies. Thus, this study investigates the extent to which teachers employ emotional intelligence (EI) competencies in their professional lives. The study employed a survey design, sampling 400 teachers working in Sakarya Province during the 2023–2024 academic year. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Competencies in Professional Life Scale developed by Titrek (2005). The scale's validity and reliability were confirmed with Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency coefficient) of 0.96, indicating high reliability. The data were analysed using the SPSS statistical package. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a t-test were employed to address research problems. The findings revealed that age was associated with statistically significant differences in teachers' self-awareness and empathy. However, no statistically significant differences were found based on gender. Lastly, teachers' empathy levels differed significantly by teaching experience, with the difference observed between teachers with 0-5 years' experience and those with 20 or more years' experience.

**Keywords:** Teacher, preschool education, emotional intelligence, professional life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Providing high-quality education in schools is essential for societal growth and for achieving the level of prosperity observed in developed countries. However, for students to succeed, the quality of education in schools must be improved. A significant improvement in the success rates of schools largely depends on the quality of teachers. In other words, quality teachers are indispensable for cultivating successful students (Özyar, 2003; Seferoğlu, 2003). Since teachers are trained in teacher-training institutions, these institutions bear great responsibility for this process (Okçabol, 2000; Türkoğlu, 1991). Teachers, as the cornerstone of human resources in educational institutions, play a critical role in defining the quality and success of these institutions. They form the foundation of educational excellence and are a key factor in establishing an institution's competitive advantage.

Preschool education in Turkey, which changed age levels over the past decade, was first defined in official educational literature at the 14th National Education Council convened by the Ministry of National Education in 1993. It was described as an educational process designed to provide rich, stimulating, and developmentally appropriate opportunities for children aged 0–72 months. This process aims to support their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development to guide them effectively in alignment with the cultural values of society and to prepare them for primary education, which is part of the broader framework of basic education (Çakır, 2017: 2048). Despite the progress toward becoming an information society, individuals still accept information without questioning it. To prevent this, it is essential to equip individuals, starting from preschool education, with critical thinking — a key higher-order thinking skill — and emotional intelligence competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and relationship management. Psychological and developmental research suggests that education plays a role as significant as genetics in the development of emotional intelligence. Although not widely recognized, research and practical applications have clearly demonstrated that emotional intelligence can be learned. Teachers' emotional intelligence and their ability to apply it in their professional practice directly influence the achievement of educational goals. Individuals with high emotional intelligence recognize their emotions, understand what they want, are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and manage their emotions to make healthier decisions. Thus, a teacher with emotional intelligence is expected to recognize and manage their emotions, empathize with others, and handle challenging situations by drawing on their emotional abilities. Teachers with these skills are considered more likely to achieve happiness in their personal and professional lives, reach their goals, and attain success. In fact, the objectives and duties of preschool education, updated by the Ministry of National Education in 2024, align with the general goals and principles of national education. These objectives include supporting children's physical, mental, and emotional development; helping them develop good habits,

facilitating their adaptation to social life; preparing them for primary school, providing a common and nurturing environment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and families; and ensuring that children speak Turkish correctly and fluently. Moreover, the 2024 Preschool Education Program includes 22 outcomes and 129 indicators in the domains of social-emotional development and values education (Ministry of National Education Preschool Education Program, 2024). Within this framework, it is evident that emotional intelligence competencies are central to social and emotional development.

### **Definition and Characteristics of Emotional Intelligence**

Following the increased focus on individuals as a key labour factor within organizations, the study of intelligence and its various forms gained prominence. Intelligence remains a concept that psychologists find challenging to define, with no universal consensus on its meaning. According to the philosophy dictionary, intelligence is described as "the ability to comprehend, recognize, combine, separate, and select signs associated with situations and relationships." In contemporary use, intelligence serves as an indicator of quality for a range of behaviours and is used to understand and interpret human behaviour (Doğan and Şahin, 2007: 233). Salovey and Mayer (1990) proposed that intelligence is related to emotions and introduced the concept of emotional intelligence.

The concept of emotional intelligence, commonly abbreviated as EI, is also widely referred to in the literature as EQ (Emotional Quotient). EQ is commonly regarded as the emotional counterpart to IQ (Intelligence Quotient). Emotional intelligence was first defined in 1990 by Peter Salovey of Yale University's Psychology Department and John D. Mayer of the University of New Hampshire. According to their definition, emotional intelligence is "a subform of social intelligence related to the ability of an individual to monitor their own and others' feelings and emotions, to distinguish between them, and to use this information to guide their own thoughts and actions" (Mayer & Salovey, 1995: 433; Salovey & Mayer, 1990: 189).

According to Bar-On (2006), emotional intelligence is a set of emotional and social skills that enable individuals to effectively understand themselves and others, express themselves, build relationships, and address daily needs in the best possible way. Similarly, Baltaş (2006: 7) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively use one's own emotions and those of others to cope with stress, to evaluate one's emotions, and to consider the desires, needs, strengths, and weaknesses of others in order to gain social acceptance. Izard (2001) notes that emotional intelligence comprises skills that allow individuals to understand themselves and others, adapt to their environment, establish meaningful relationships, and manage the challenges within their surroundings. According to Cooper and Sawaf (2000), emotional intelligence is "the ability to sense, understand, and effectively use the power and rapid understanding of emotions as a source of human energy, knowledge, relationships, and influence" (Çakar & Arbak, 2004: 39). Konrad and Hendl (2005:13) describe emotional intelligence as a combination of emotional

traits such as composure, effort, perseverance, and talent that are essential for motivating oneself and others.

According to Yaylacı (2006: 49-50):

- Emotional intelligence is not the opposite of intelligence. To think more rationally, we rely on intuition and signals from our emotions. Conversely, we need rational thinking to utilize emotions effectively. The coordinated functioning of the brain and heart is crucial.
- It is not merely about being in touch with emotions or entirely releasing them. Emotional intelligence does not involve acting uncontrollably or impulsively, nor is it about suppressing or rigidly controlling emotions. Rather, it concerns the effective use of the appropriate emotion at the appropriate moment.
- It is not simply about being good or kind-hearted. Emotional intelligence requires individuals, when necessary, to convey unpleasant truths in relationships. It is not merely a concept related to personal development. Skills associated with emotional intelligence—such as empathy, active listening, conflict resolution, and dialogue management—often contribute to success and performance in professional life.
- It is not an activity aimed at improving an individual's performance or ensuring discipline. Emotional intelligence is not a quick solution that enables immediate recognition of differences. While individuals can learn a word or a process within an hour, developing the ability to manage anger or excitability can take much longer. Emotional intelligence is a lifelong process.

Drawing on these explanations, emotional intelligence can be defined as the process by which an individual perceives, interprets, and regulates both their own emotions and those of others and develops strategies that align with emotional expectations and positively influence their life and energy. In other words, emotional intelligence is the ability to perform effective emotional manoeuvres to achieve success and satisfaction in both intrapersonal and interpersonal domains (Yaylacı, 2006: 49).

Goleman (2012a: 62), who made significant contributions to the development of the concept of emotional intelligence, defines it as the ability to motivate oneself, persist in the face of setbacks, control impulses, and delay gratification, regulate one's mood, prevent distress from interfering with thinking, empathize with others, and maintain hope. In short, emotional intelligence is our ability to manage our own emotions and our potential to build positive relationships (Goleman, 2007: 10).

Based on the definitions above, emotional intelligence can be conceptualized as the ability to recognize and control one's emotions, cope with adverse situations, and understand and balance the emotions of others, in order to satisfy needs most effectively. It also involves building and appropriately managing positive relationships. From the perspective of emotional intelligence, its development is particularly important. Research

has shown that the concept of "intelligence" should not be considered solely as intellectual intelligence (IQ), but should also encompass emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence includes an individual's awareness of their emotional traits, the ability to control these emotions, empathize with others, maintain intrinsic motivation, and attain competence in interpersonal relationships. Emotional intelligence, which plays a crucial role in individuals' attainment of satisfaction and happiness in both professional and social lives, is equally vital in education and organizations. In the 21st century, research has increasingly focused on the application of emotional intelligence in education. The emotional-intelligence teacher model guides students in addressing undesirable classroom behaviours and acquiring essential skills.

Previous research identified various factors influencing emotional intelligence among teachers. Özmen (2009) reported associations between elementary school teachers' fields of specialization, gender, age, experience, and emotional intelligence, highlighting that their fields of specialization and gender significantly affect emotional intelligence. Similarly, Akbaş (2006) suggested that teachers' ages influence their emotional intelligence, while Toytok (2013) found that marital status and experience also influence emotional intelligence among primary school teachers. Erdem, İlhan, and Çelik (2013) revealed that teachers' educational levels impact their emotional intelligence, and Kızıl (2014) concluded that factors such as gender, age, school level, field of specialization, and experience are influential in determining emotional intelligence. Additionally, Yavuz (2018) observed that teachers' gender significantly affects their emotional intelligence. These findings collectively underline the multifaceted nature of emotional intelligence and the various demographic and professional factors that contribute to its development among educators

### Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence

Researchers studying emotional intelligence undoubtedly drew significant insights from Howard Gardner's "multiple intelligence" model, introduced in 1983. Gardner, one of the most influential theorists of intelligence, emphasized the distinction between intellectual (academic) abilities and emotional abilities. His framework of seven, later expanded to eight, intelligence domains includes not only traditional verbal and mathematical abilities but also two personal domains: "social and personal intelligence" (Gardner, 1997; 1999). Building on these concepts, scholars of emotional intelligence developed a model encompassing five talent domains, integrating Gardner's personal domains (Goleman, 1998; Lazarus, 1999; Weisinger, 1998):

- Self-awareness is the ability to recognize, understand, and accurately evaluate one's own emotions. Self-awareness forms the foundation of emotional intelligence, involving the recognition of an emotion while it is occurring. It is a psychological insight.
- Emotional self-regulation involves the ability to manage emotions appropriately. It does not imply being overwhelmed by emotions or suppressing them, but rather

expressing emotions in a balanced, harmonious manner. Emotional self-control, including the capacity to delay gratification in pursuit of a goal, is a critical aspect of this ability.

- Motivation: It refers to the capacity to mobilize emotions in pursuit of a goal. It is rooted in internal motivation and key to initiating tasks and seeing them through to completion. In emotional intelligence, motivation involves using one's emotional system to direct energy toward achieving objectives.
- Empathy (understanding the feelings of others) is the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes and to understand their emotions. It is fundamental to building relationships and originates in self-awareness. The more attuned one is to their own emotions, the better they can comprehend others' emotions.
- Managing Relationships (Social Skills): This involves establishing and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships, often referred to as "social arts" or "the art of relationships. According to Goleman (1998), this skill requires the maturation of self-management and empathy.

### **The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Education**

Family life serves as the first school that imparts emotional lessons. In this close-knit environment, we learn how to perceive ourselves, how others react to our feelings, how to process these feelings, and how to respond to them. This also involves understanding how to express hopes and fears. Emotional lessons come not only from what parents directly say and do but also from how they manage their own emotions and how they model interactions. Some parents are gifted emotional teachers, while others can be cruel (Goleman, 2012a: 252). More recently, some authors have argued that emotions are important in schools and in school leadership (Ginsberg, 2020).

In developing emotional intelligence, three factors are key: the student, parent, and teacher. Emotional intelligence education should begin in preschool and continue throughout life. Given that childhood is a pivotal period for emotional development, parents and teachers must prioritize emotional intelligence training during these early years (Vural & Koçabaş, 2011). School administrators and teachers should also play a role in supporting the development of emotional intelligence. These three factors—students, parents, and teachers—should work together in harmony. Emotional intelligence education should begin in preschool and extend to parents, who must also be educated in these skills. Teachers should receive emotional intelligence training during their university education. If this approach is implemented as a program, it could result in a generation of parents and teachers well-equipped to nurture emotional intelligence in students, contributing to a more effective educational experience (Tufan, 2011: 26).

In recent years, emotional intelligence studies have started to focus on preschool and early childhood education processes. Xu (2024) Moreover, Chun & Han (2024), Gavín-Chocano (2024), Wang (2024), Walter et al (2025), Shaffy, A., & Ndijuye, L. G. (2025), Yuan

et al. (2025), Veraksa (2025), Rahmaniya (2025) claim that developing emotional intelligence is an important issue for children and children's education, and they investigated emotional intelligence during pre-school educational processes based on teachers' perceptions.

However, no studies have examined the impact of emotional intelligence on pre-school education in Turkey or the measurement of emotional intelligence among pre-school educators. Pektane Gülmез and Gültekin Akduman (2022) studied mothers of children in preschool education, while Koç Akran and Kocaman (2019) investigated the effects of visualisation-based activities on children's emotional intelligence. Therefore, research aimed at determining pre-school teachers' emotional intelligence levels has emerged as an important topic for the development of pre-school education in Turkey.

### **Purpose of the study**

To ensure the effectiveness of educational institutions, in which human elements and distinctive human characteristics are central, it is more important to consider emotions than in other types of institutions. Human relationships lie at the core of education, and the effective management of these relationships depends on emotional intelligence. This study investigates the extent to which teachers use emotional intelligence competencies in their professional lives, employing a quantitative approach. The aim is to assess the level of participants' emotional intelligence competencies in their professional lives with respect to demographic factors such as age, gender, and years of experience. To this end, the research problems were formulated as follows:

- What is the level of use of emotional intelligence competencies by teachers studying in Sakarya province in their professional life?
- Does the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in their professional life differ significantly by their age?
- Does the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in their professional life differ significantly by gender?
- Does the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in their professional life differ significantly by experience?

### **METHOD**

This section provides information on the research design, sample, data-collection tools, and data analysis.

#### **Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey method to assess the teachers' emotional intelligence levels. The survey model is a research method commonly used to determine

participants' attitudes and opinions regarding a particular research topic. Moreover, the descriptive survey model is implemented using questionnaire-type measurement tools and is particularly characterised by its strengths in "obtaining and interpreting behavioural data, collecting more accurate and comprehensive data, being cheaper and faster to implement, and having a rapid data collection process the ability to collect large volumes of data quickly and at low cost, etc. (Karakaya, 2012). In survey studies, the primary goal is to describe individuals' characteristics, such as their attitudes, interests, skills, and self-efficacy related to the subject under study, without intervening in the current situation (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018). While survey models are not concerned with the causes of events, they aim to uncover individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and other characteristics concerning the situation under study.

### Sample

The study sample includes 988 preschool teachers employed in public and private preschool education institutions in the central district of Sakarya Province during the 2023-2024 academic year. The sample was intended to comprise 384 teachers selected through convenience sampling, one of the non-probability sampling approaches (Altınışik et al., 2004: 129-130). However, 400 teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

### Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using "Emotional Intelligence Competencies in Professional Life Scale" developed by Titrek (2005). The scale consists of five sub-scales and a total of 72 items: "Self-Awareness (12 items)", "Managing Emotions (15 items)", "Motivating Emotions (14 items)", "Empathy (12 items)", and "Social Skills (19 items)". The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale with the following response options: (1) Never; (2) Very rarely; (3) Sometimes; (4) Very often; and (5) Always.

The scale demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84). Confirmatory factor analysis was performed for each subscale, and item validity was confirmed for all subscales. The corrected item-total correlations ranged from .30 to .67, all of which were positive. For each sub-scale, a scoring range was established to assess the level of emotional intelligence:

Self-Awareness: 49-60 points indicate "Very sufficient"; 37-48 points indicate "Sufficient"; 25-36 points indicate "Deficiencies" that require development; and 24 points or below indicate "Insufficient" and require significant improvement.

Managing Emotions: 61-75 points indicate "Very sufficient," 46-60 points indicate "Sufficient," 31-45 points indicate "Deficiencies," and below 30 points indicate "Insufficient" and requiring much effort to improve.

Motivating Emotions: 57-70 points indicate "Very sufficient"; 43-56 points indicate "Sufficient"; 29-42 points indicate "Deficiencies"; and below 28 points indicate "Insufficient" and require substantial effort.

Empathy: 49-60 points indicate "Very sufficient"; 37-48 points indicate "Sufficient"; 25-36 points indicate "Deficiencies"; and below 24 points indicate "Insufficient" and require significant improvement.

Social Skills: 77-95 points indicate "Very sufficient," 58-76 points indicate "Sufficient," 39-57 points indicate "Deficiencies," and below 38 points indicate "Insufficient" and need substantial effort.

The research was conducted with permission from the Sakarya University Ethics Committee on 11.01.2024, under the reference number E-61923333-050.99-324645. A test of normality was performed to determine whether the data were normally distributed. The results of this test are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*The distribution of the data*

Scale / Sub-scales	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Emotional Intelligence Scale</b>	400	294.86	30.89	-.181	-.161
Self-awareness	400	49.80	5.47	-.251	-.049
Managing emotions	400	63.24	6.53	-.473	.883
Motivating emotions	400	56.26	6.95	-.253	.005
Empathy	400	49.40	5.84	-.261	-.147
Social skills	400	76.17	10.40	-.315	-.146

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients in Table 1 range from -1 to +1, which, according to Hair et al. (2013), indicate that the data are approximately normally distributed. Based on the results presented in Table 1, the data for all subscales and the total scale are approximately normally distributed. Thus, parametric tests were deemed appropriate to address the research problems. Specifically, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life differed significantly by gender. Additionally, one-way ANOVA was applied to compare teachers' levels of use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life across age and experience groups.

## FINDINGS

In this section of the article, the research data have been analysed and the findings have been tabulated and interpreted.

### Findings on the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life

**Table 2.***Descriptive statistics regarding teachers' levels of using emotional intelligence competencies in professional life*

Scale/ Sub-scale	Min.-Max.	X	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Emotional intelligence	72.00-360.00	294.86	30.89	-.181	-.161
Self-awareness	12.00-60.00	49.80	5.47	-.251	-.049
Managing emotions	15.00-75.00	63.24	6.53	-.473	.883
Motivating emotions	14.00-70.00	56.26	6.95	-.253	.005
Empathy	12.00-60.00	49.40	5.84	-.261	-.147
Social skills	19.00-95.00	76.17	10.40	-.315	-.146

The findings indicate that preschool teachers demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence competencies in their professional lives ( $X = 294.86$ ;  $SD = 30.89$ ). Across subscales, mean scores indicate high performance in self-awareness ( $X = 49.80$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ), managing emotions ( $X = 63.24$ ,  $SD = 6.53$ ), motivating emotions ( $X = 56.26$ ,  $SD = 6.95$ ), empathy ( $X = 49.40$ ,  $SD = 5.84$ ), and social skills ( $X = 76.17$ ,  $SD = 10.40$ ). These results suggest that the emotional intelligence competencies of preschool teachers in their professional settings are generally rated as sufficient or very sufficient and reflect a strong ability to manage emotions effectively, motivate themselves and others, empathize, and demonstrate social skills.

### **Investigation of the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by age**

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life, including self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating emotions, empathy, and social skills, across age groups. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.***Comparison of teachers' levels of using emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by age*

Scale/ Sub-scale	Age	n	X	SD	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Emotional Intelligence	20-30	39	290.69	25.25	Between groups	9681.834	5	1936.367		
	31-35	59	294.93	32.03	Within groups	371033.043	394	941.708	2.06	.070
	35-40	99	287.97	31.36	Total	380714.878	399			

	41-44	86	296.64	33.34				
	45-50	55	300.95	30.47				
	$\geq 51$	62	300.53	27.57				
	Total	400	294.86	30.89				
Self-awareness	20-30	39	48.64	5.15	Between groups	404.153	5	80.831
	31-35	59	49.68	5.56	Within groups	11542.444	394	29.296
	35-40	99	48.53	5.62	Total	11946.598	399	
	41-44	86	51.09	5.15				2.76 .018*
	45-50	55	50.65	5.61				
	$\geq 51$	62	50.11	5.27				
	Total	400	49.8	5.47				
Managing emotions	20-30	39	62.74	5.3	Between groups	342.453	5	68.491
	31-35	59	62.83	6.62	Within groups	16665.457	394	42.298
	35-40	99	62.12	6.93	Total	17007.910	399	
	41-44	86	63.34	7.43				1.62 .154
	45-50	55	64.02	6.03				
	$\geq 51$	62	64.87	5.29				
	Total	400	63.24	6.53				
Motivating emotions	20-30	39	55.72	5.54	Between groups	494.128	5	98.826
	31-35	59	56.27	7.28	Within groups	18752.832	394	47.596
	35-40	99	54.61	7.07	Total	19246.960	399	
	41-44	86	56.63	7.33				2.08 .068
	45-50	55	57.67	6.59				
	$\geq 51$	62	57.47	6.65				
	Total	400	56.26	6.95				

	20-30	39	47.95	5.21	Between groups	476.459	5	95.292
	31-35	59	50.05	6.64	Within groups	13145.338	394	33.364
	35-40	99	47.98	6.04	Total	13621.798	399	
Empathy	41-44	86	49.62	6.19				2.86 .015*
	45-50	55	50.60	4.82				
	≥51	62	50.58	4.91				
	Total	400	49.4	5.84				
	20-30	39	75.64	9.98	Between groups	511.846	5	102.369
	31-35	59	76.1	9.51	Within groups	42625.931	394	108.188
	35-40	99	74.74	10.37	Total	43137.778	399	
Social skills	41-44	86	75.97	11.16				0.95 .451
	45-50	55	78	10.76				
	≥51	62	77.5	10.09				
	Total	400	76.17	10.4				

\*p<.05

Table 3 reveals that the overall level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence (EI) competencies in their professional lives does not differ significantly across age groups ( $F(5,394) = 2.06$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Similarly, no significant differences are observed in the subscales of managing emotions ( $F(5,394) = 1.62$ ,  $p > .05$ ), motivating emotions ( $F(5,394) = 2.08$ ,  $p > .05$ ), and social skills ( $F(5,394) = 0.95$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, self-awareness levels differed significantly by age ( $F(5, 394) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and post hoc analysis indicated that teachers aged 41–44 ( $X = 51.09$ ) exhibited higher self-awareness than those aged 35–40 ( $X = 48.53$ ). Similarly, empathy levels differ significantly across age groups ( $F(5, 394) = 2.86$ ,  $p < .05$ ), with post hoc results showing higher empathy among teachers aged 45–50 ( $X = 50.60$ ) and 51 and older ( $X = 50.58$ ) compared to those aged 35–40 ( $X = 47.98$ ).

### Investigation of the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by gender

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the level of preschool teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional lives differs by gender (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Comparison of teachers' levels of using emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by gender

Scale / Sub-scale	Group	n	X	SD	df	t	p
Emotional Intelligence	Female	224	296.37	30.68	398	-1,10	.271
	Male	176	292.94	31.04			
Self-awareness	Female	224	49.68	5.37	398	0,49	.624
	Male	176	49.95	5.61			
Managing emotions	Female	224	63.57	6.66	398	-1,15	.252
	Male	176	62.81	6.35			
Motivating emotions	Female	224	56. 58	6.95	398	-1,04	.299
	Male	176	55. 85	6.94			
Empathy	Female	224	49.63	5.92	398	-0,88	.380
	Male	176	49.11	5.74			
Social skills	Female	224	76.92	10.49	398	-1,63	,105
	Male	176	75.22	10.23			

As Table 4 shows, the extent to which preschool teachers use emotional intelligence competencies in professional life does not differ significantly by gender. Similarly, an investigation of the subscales reveals no significant gender-based differences in self-awareness, managing emotions, motivation, empathy, or social skills ( $p > .05$ ).

### Investigation of the level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by experience

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether the extent to which teachers use emotional intelligence competencies in professional life differs significantly based on their experience.

**Table 5.** Comparison of teachers' levels of using emotional intelligence competencies in professional life by experience

Scale / Sub-scale	Experience	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Emotional intelligence	0-5 years	47	289.49	24.68	Between groups	7094.348	4	1773.587		
	6-10 years	60	294.58	32.34	Within groups	373620.529	395	945.875		
	11-15 years	69	300.52	32.54	Total	380714.878	399		1.88	.114
	16-20 years	143	291.36	33.65						
	$\geq 20$ years	81	299.53	25.27						
	Total	400	294.86	30.89						
Self-awareness	0-5 years	47	48.21	4.95	Between groups	191.902	4	47.975		
	6-10 years	60	50.03	5.64	Within groups	11754.696	395	29.759		
	11-15 years	69	50.75	5.35	Total	11946.598	399		1.61	.170
	16-20 years	143	49.64	5.62						
	$\geq 20$ years	81	50.01	5.39						
	Total	400	49.8	5.47						
Managing emotions	0-5 years	47	62.47	5.29	Between groups	186.188	4	46.547		
	6-10 years	60	63.02	6.6	Within groups	16821.722	395	42.587	1.09	.360
	11-15 years	69	63.86	7.03	Total	17007.910	399			
	16-20 years	143	62.69	7.23						
	$\geq 20$ years	81	64.27	5.21						
	Total	400	63.24	6.53						
Motivating emotions	0-5 years	47	55.85	5.67		146.764	4	36.691		
	6-10 years	60	55.55	7.12		19100.196	395	48.355	.76	.553
	11-15 years	69	57.1	7.53		19246.960	399			

	16-20 years	143	55.89	7.36				
	≥20 years	81	56.96	6.2				
	Total	400	56.26	6.95				
Empathy	0-5 years	47	47.91	4.9	Between groups	429.306	4	107.326
	6-10 years	60	49.67	6.78	Within groups	13192.492	395	33.399
	11-15 years	69	50.52	5.82	Total	13621.798	399	
	16-20 years	143	48.52	6.18			3.2	
	≥20 years	81	50.64	4.53			1	.013*
	Total	400	49.4	5.84				
Social skills	0-5 years	47	75.04	9.38	Between groups	892.213	4	223.053
	6-10 years	60	76.32	9.56	Within groups	42245.565	395	106.951
	11-15 years	69	78.29	10.71	Total	43137.778	399	
	16-20 years	143	74.62	11.49			2.0	
	≥20 years	81	77.64	8.85			9	.082
	Total	400	76.17	10.4				

\*p>.05

As Table 5 shows, the overall level of teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional lives does not differ significantly across experience levels ( $F(4, 395) = 1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, when examining the subscales, teachers' empathy levels differed significantly across experience levels ( $F(5, 394) = 3.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Scheffé's post hoc analysis was applied, and it indicates that this difference occurs between teachers with 0–5 years of experience ( $X = 47.91$ ) and those with 20 or more years of experience ( $X = 50.64$ ). These findings suggest that teachers with greater professional experience tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy than those in the early stages of their careers.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An examination of the findings regarding the level of preschool teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life, along with their subscales, revealed that their overall use of these competencies was generally sufficient and commendable. Even the skills perceived as least developed—social skills—are considered by preschool teachers to be adequate.

To determine whether preschool teachers' levels of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life (self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating emotions, empathy, and social skills) differ significantly by age, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results indicate no significant differences in the overall levels of emotional intelligence competencies across age groups. Similarly, an analysis of the subscales reveals no significant differences among age groups in managing and motivating emotions or in social skill levels. Preschool teachers' self-awareness levels differed significantly by age. Post hoc analysis revealed that this difference was between teachers aged 35–40 and those aged 41–44. Similarly, preschool teachers' empathy levels varied significantly with age. Post hoc comparisons indicated that teachers aged 35–40 differed from those aged 45–50 and from those aged 51 and over. These findings are consistent with previous research; for example, Akın (2004) found no significant association between emotional intelligence and age. Similarly, Öztürk and Deniz (2006) and Özdemir and Özdemir (2007) reported no significant differences in emotional intelligence dimensions by age. In contrast, Akbaş (2006) found that teachers' ages influenced their emotional intelligence level.

Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life differed by gender. The results indicated no significant gender-based differences in emotional intelligence competencies. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Güney (2009), who also found no significant gender-based differences in emotional intelligence. However, Yavuz (2018) determined that gender influenced teachers' emotional intelligence.

To examine whether preschool teachers' use of emotional intelligence competencies in professional life differs significantly based on their experience, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The results indicated no significant differences in overall emotional intelligence competencies across levels of experience. However, when analyzing the subscales, teachers' empathy levels varied significantly with experience. Post hoc analysis revealed that this difference was between teachers with 0–5 years of experience and those with 20 or more years of experience. These findings suggest that teachers with more experience tend to exhibit greater empathy than those in the early stages of their careers. The studies by Güler (2006), Öztürk (2006), and Canbulat (2007) support these findings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pre-school teachers with higher emotional intelligence tend to have stronger organizational engagement, being highly engaged with their school, their teaching, the teaching profession, and their colleagues. Both preschool teachers and teacher candidates should be advised to attend training courses, seminars, and in-service training programs on developing emotional intelligence and applying it in the educational process.
2. Since emotional intelligence is a skill that can be developed, incorporating such training into educational curricula at all levels (preschool through university) could be valuable for future generations.
3. During teacher-candidate training, case studies and activities designed to enhance emotional intelligence in classroom management could be integrated into the curriculum to improve candidates' practical teaching skills.
4. To support the career advancement of teachers pursuing postgraduate education, institutions can remove barriers, implement measures to increase professional satisfaction, and improve organizational conditions that may negatively affect levels of emotional intelligence.
5. Further research could investigate the level of teachers' emotional intelligence competence in classroom management from the perspectives of their students. Comparative analysis of these findings could yield additional insights and conclusions.

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## Data Availability Declaration

The data can be shared upon request.

## Author Contributions

Turan Çakır and Hacer Dervişoğlu contributed equally to this work. They collaboratively handled the conceptualization, methodology design, data acquisition, and analysis. Each author played a significant role in drafting and revising the manuscript, ensuring its intellectual depth and coherence. All authors have thoroughly reviewed, provided critical feedback, and approved the final version of the manuscript. They jointly take responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the research.

### *Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest*

**Ethics statement:** We hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study. We take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

### *Statement of interest:*

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