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Professors' Emotional Competencies And Learning In Education: An Exploratory Analysis Within A Tunisian University

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Abstract

Emotions or 'soft' strengths are attracting more and more researchers' attention, they are perceived today as skills that characterize the degree of individuals' professionalism, especially teachers and refer to both emotional intelligence and social or relational intelligence. We will focus on the role of emotions and emotional skills among university teachers as they affect learning and teaching relationship. Our goal is to identify emotional skills among university teachers, to examine the emotional factors portal on learning, to discern the teaching style that values emotional skills among university teachers, and build an education model based on emotional learning, which showcases the emotional competencies of teachers. To do this, we conducted an exploratory analysis supported by an inductive methodology. Data collection was made through semi-structured interviews with 16 university teachers of different grades and belonging to a university (ISCAE). A thematic content analysis was mobilized and the results show that emotions are at the heart of the teacher-student relationship, the emotional dimension influences teacher's work emotions, beliefs, attitudes and motivation to teach. It is therefore appropriate to privilege emotional factors during learning. Our results also support the idea that emotional competencies such as self-management, relationship management and social know-how are the fundamental qualities for a successful learning by teaching.

Keywords: *emotions, emotional intelligence, emotional competencies, emotional learning, educational learning.*

1. Introduction

Since the seminal work of Simon (1955) about the limited rationality, several studies have focused on studying the implications of bounded rationality, particularly in decision-making process, intuition (Dane and Pratt, 2007), spirituality (Neck & Milliman, 1994; Emmons (2000) or emotions (Goleman, 2000; Salovey and Mayer, 1997) are some recent examples of the importance of this axis of research.

We aimed in this study to explore the emotional skills among university professors by advancing the following questions: How university professors' emotional skills can affect learning by teaching? Indeed, we will question (1) whether the university professors consider their emotions during instruction (2) and whether emotionally intelligent professors can provide better learning than others?

This research pursues three main research objectives: firstly, we focus on the relationship between affect, learning and organizational change, secondly, we analyze the relationship between emotions and leadership, and finally, we study emotional intelligence as a professional skill (Frémeaux and Noel, 2014).



Associating emotional intelligence and learning by teaching is of a particular interest for several reasons: First, few studies have focused on the study of affective dimensions, including emotional skills as a part of learning by teaching in academia (Letor, 2011). Second, a new concept of learning should be adopted where the professor would be perceived as an expert of learning (Letor, 2011), a mediator, an emotionally competent person. Finally, the social effects of non-performing learning systems are nowadays a focus for management researchers and educational science specialists "many of them considering that one of the objectives of a good teacher is to help pupils achieving their potential as learners and as individuals, which necessarily implies the recognition of the emotional dimension "(Arnold, 2006;1).

Our epistemological position will be constructivism since our aim is purely exploratory based on an inductive methodology. Data collection was made through semi-structured interviews with sixteen teachers of different levels belonging to a public academic institution that is the Higher Institute of Accounting and Business Administration.

The structure of this research is as follows: First, we'll clarify the emotional intelligence concept by referring to the major theories related to. Second, we'll analyze the conceptual evolution and the transition from emotional skills to emotional learning. Third, we'll explain our methodology before discussing the results of our research and finally, we'll conclude.

2. Emotional Intelligence: Accuracy Concept

According to Damasio (1995), emotions are likely to channel the cognitive process and the person thinking, affect perceptions, choices, intentions, interpretations, motivations and behaviors. Several authors such as Chanouf and Rouan (2004) argue that individuals behavioral destabilization can be caused by a loss in the emotional reaction ability. According to Hoffman (1984) emotions stimulate communication by their informational role "the communication of emotion, also allows the person who feels it to explain to others how he perceived the situation (called complementary) which aims to change its behavior "(Nugier, 2009: 9).

Salovey and Mayer (1997) define emotional intelligence as a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to understand their own emotions and others' ones and to distinguish between them. They also claim that the scope of emotional intelligence includes verbal and nonverbal assessment of emotional expression, regulation of ones and others emotions and the capacity to use emotional content in problem solving. Mayer et al. (2001) confirm that emotional intelligence is a subset of social intelligence. They consider that emotionally intelligent person has the ability to identify, understand and express their emotions, facilitating reflexivity, and allows better adaptability in any situation.

According to Goleman and al. (2002) emotional intelligence reflects person's ability to understand his own emotions (self-awareness) and those of others. According to them, emotionally intelligent persons are able to regulate their moods and feelings and those of others. Hence, emotional intelligence is strongly related to leadership because it will permeate the relationship between a leader and his employees. "Being emotionally intelligent means being able to detect emotions and feelings of others in order to provide empathy" (Hahusseau, 2006: 126).

Bar-on (1997) and Goleman (1995) suggest that emotional intelligence is not based only on pure intelligence linked to emotions but it includes other dimensions such as motivation, cognitive abilities, social skills, and personality traits (Mayer and al. 2000).

We build our theoretical framework on the multiple intelligence theory of Gardner (1997). We choose to focus on two types of intelligences that are interpersonal and intra personal intelligences. The intra personal intelligence depends on better identification of his own emotions; this ability allows the person to better understand his motivations, strengths and weaknesses. The interpersonal intelligence is the ability of a person to identify others' emotions and to temper their moods and arouse their motivations. These qualities are important in the workplace; they reflect human sociability, benevolence, cooperation and initiatives for sharing, his communication and integration capacity.



Petrides and Furnham (2007) consider emotional intelligence as a personality trait dimension because every person is different from others by his ability to detect, treat, and identify affective informations. This model contains five aspects of emotional intelligence gathered in four categories such as welfare, self-control, emotionality and sociability.

3. From Emotional SKILLS TO EMOTIONAL LEARNING

According to Goleman et al. (2002) emotional intelligence can't constitute in itself a reliable predictor of job performance, we should replace it by emotional competencies that reflect the individuals' performance in the workplace.

Table 1 : Emotional competencies

	Intrapersonal Personal skills Self-consciousness	Interpersonal Social abilities Social consciousness
consciousness	Awareness of one's own emotions awareness of their effect on the behavior and decisions fair perception of self Self-confidence	empathy Organizational awareness Communications capacity Helpfulness
The regulation	Self-management Perseverance optimism Transparency The sense of initiative integrity	Conflict management The Influence Team motivation The inspiration through leadership The leader Sociability Creating link The ability to work in groups and collaboration.

Source: Adapted from Goleman et al (2002).

Emotional competencies are mainly emotional and interpersonal skills required for the practice of teaching "knowing each other, knowing how to manage students' emotions, understanding those of others, are part of the necessary skills in the teacher's profession" (Gendron, 2008 : 7).

Table 2: the four basic emotional competencies

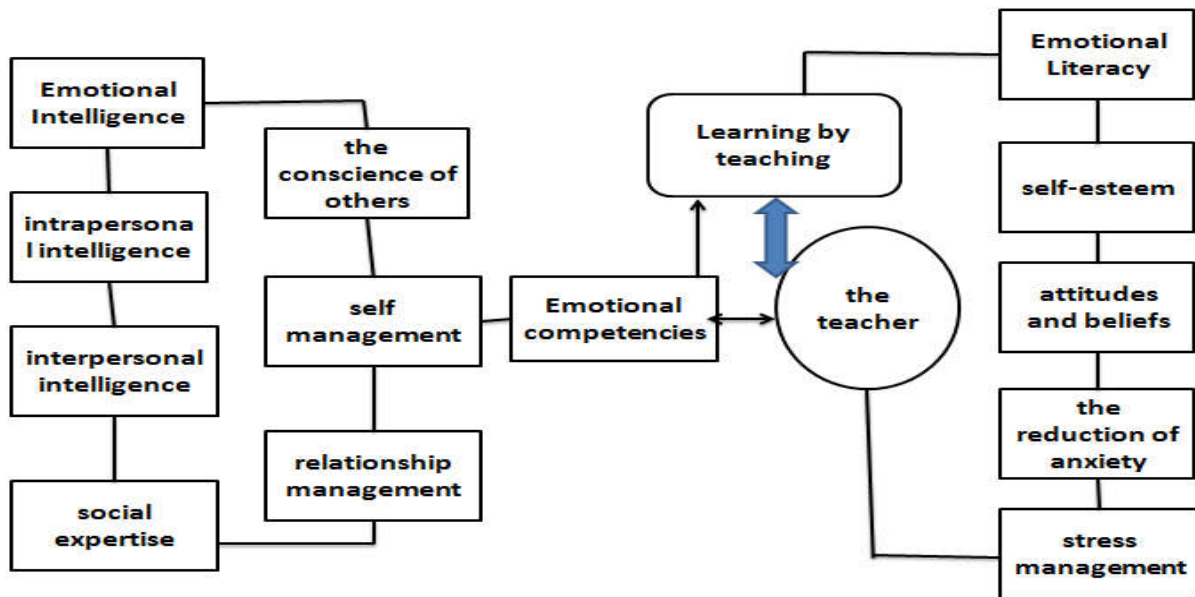
	At the intrapersonal level, it is the ability to:	At the interpersonal level, it is the ability to:
Identify	Identify the emotional experience	Identify others' emotional processes
Express	Express emotions appropriately in the context	Allow others to express their feelings and facilitate this expression
Understand	Understanding the emotional experience in the present context	Understanding the experience and the reaction of his interlocutors
regulate	Manage and regulate its unpleasant emotions based on the context and objectives Regulate its positive emotions and make emotions a strong point: use emotions to be more creative, to make better decisions.	Regulate and manage unpleasant emotions in their relational dimension, for example in the context of conflict. Regulate positive emotions in the relationship, for example to create motivation, install a creative atmosphere

Source : Adapted from Kotsou (2012 :53)

Emotional capital is defined by Gendron (2008) as a harmony of emotional skills, it is an asset for the well-being and professional efficiency, and contributes to social cohesion. Emotional competencies are then the result of emotional regulation development.

Our model will be presented as follows

Figure 1: The emotional factors affecting learning



3. Methodology

The methodology is qualitative pursuing an exploratory objective. To attain this goal, we adopt an inductive reasoning. Indeed induction is recommended to better understand the "social process" behind (Miles & Huberman, 1991: 31).

The semi-structured interview is appropriate for this type of study because it would "let the interviewee speak as freely as possible while incorporating significant points that could bring out the meanings associated with this accommodation and its context" (Blanchet and Goteman, 2007: 7).

We conducted an exploratory study based on a sample that consists of 15 professors belonging to different levels in the hierarchy (1 temporary, 4 assistants, 9 assistant professors, 1 associate professor), working in the Higher Institute of Accounting and Business Administration. The interviewed professors are predominantly women (9 women and 7 men). The interviews were conducted between April 17th and May 4th, 2015 in the staff room or in the classroom after obtaining their agreement. These interviews lasted on average 25 minutes. We didn't use recorders but noted all responses taking care to manually decrypt the gestural, the grimaces and every manifestation of the emotional state.

4. Results and Conclusion

The majority of interviewed professors pay great attention to their students' emotions and they put great emphasis on the importance of emotions during instruction for successful learning.

Affectivity in the learning process makes the student-professor relationship more confident, keeps an emotionally positive learning climate. Professors keep a special attention to emotions during the



courses in order to create an appropriate climate for learning. Indeed, emotions stimulate in students a sense of belonging and integration.

Communicative competence is an attitude encouraging professors to understand and learn about how to manage students' emotions, mainly in time of crisis. Collaborative work stimulates communication, making learning more interesting and promotes the exchange and interactivity, which also improves the retention of information. Dialogue and discussion allow professors to check whether the learners have understood the course or not.

The self-esteem allows students to learn better and achieve their goals. The professor's ability to increase students' self-esteem helps them go over anxiety states and motivate them for learning. Culture and life skills contribute also to increase students' self-esteem, reduce anxiety and promote energy and willingness to learn. Changing the learning style, varying manners and ways of explaining improve the learning quality by making learning more interesting and also get rid of boredom. Participatory in class is a method that stimulates students' motivation for learning. The collaborative and integrative pedagogy allow also successful learning. The relaxed atmosphere is a favorable condition for the collaborative and participatory learning.

Kindness, energy, and the teacher's flexibility allow it to establishing a trusting and respectful relational database with the students. The emotional climate is seen as an essential condition for learning. Motivation and encouragement are used to create an emotionally positive learning climate. Professors who made an effort to reassure their students to keep a good atmosphere in the classroom and to avoid stress simulators during training ensures its course with a reduced level of absenteeism.

This exploratory study enabled us to identify the emotional skills among professors and to reveal the appropriate learning style that suits these skills. Following this study, we were able to identify the following emotional skills: emotional intelligence (emotional awareness, empathy, understanding emotions, emotional regulation, emotional literacy, and the correct interpretation of the emotional information), intrapersonal intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, social skills, and awareness of others, the self-management and relationship management. After identifying the emotional skills among professors, we proceeded to the second stage of studying which is the relationship between these skills and learning. The more the teacher is emotionally competent, the more he is aware of his own emotions, is more empathetic with his students, he effectively interprets the emotional nature of information, he can regulate his emotions, he masters unpleasant situations and he has a good relationship with his students. Thus, a new approach to teaching appears, based on emotional skills. The professor is responsible for supporting learners during the learning process and makes the process more flexible and accessible through dynamic teaching practices based on exchange and interactivity.

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