

# Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator between Teachers' Emotional Mistreatment and Long-Term Emotional Impact on Students

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**Abstract** - Teacher emotional mistreatment, which includes both verbal and nonverbal abusive behaviors, is a widespread and harmful experience for school students. However, its long-term emotional impacts remain relatively unexplored. This study explored the mediating role of emotional intelligence (EI) on the association between teacher's emotional mistreatment towards school children and the long-term emotional impact on the students. A total of 297 Malaysian Muslim students in different stages of their university training completed the Psychological Maltreatment Subscale Questionnaire on teacher's mistreatment while they were in school, and the Wong and Law EI Scale. The long-term emotional impact was measured using a tool developed especially for the study. Results revealed that 36% of the participants reported being mistreated by teachers at least once. The most reported long-term emotional impacts were feeling defensive, feeling a constant need to prove their worth, and fearing not to be perceived as lazy. Teacher mistreatment had significant long-term emotional impacts and was negatively correlated with EI. EI further acted as a significant mediator in the links between teacher mistreatment and its long-term emotional impact, with an indirect effect of .032. Raising awareness among teachers as to possible long-term emotional effects of abusive behaviors may help decrease mistreatment in the future. Determining the long-term impact of emotional mistreatment on social-emotional skills can help explain and prevent various types of negative outcomes in those students at a later stage in life.

**Keywords** – Emotional Intelligence (EI), Emotional Mistreatment, Long-Term Emotional Impact, Teacher Behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers at school have the maximum influence and contact with the students outside the immediate family. The interactions with the teachers throughout the schooling days have a huge impact on the cognitive and social behaviors of the students as well as in their psychological development. In the past, maximum attention was given to the quality of studies and classroom experience of students but in recent times, the psychological and social aspects of teaching and learning are getting increasing attention [1]. Teachers show more emotions at a higher intensity and more frequently than many other professionals in other fields. As far as teaching as a profession is concerned, it is a highly respected profession and considered too vital for a nation. Emotions embrace every aspect of their personal and professional behaviors [2]. In the same line, the teacher-student relationships are influenced by the emotional expressions of a teacher. The interactions that take place every day between teachers and students can induce intense emotions in teachers. Such emotions can be negative or positive. Again, such relationships mostly decide the social relationships of teachers with their students and in the long run, affect the thoughts and behavioral patterns of the students. Specifically, the teacher-student relationships are found to dictate the academic successes, behaviors at schools and outside, and work habits later in the life of the students. Such relationships also control to a great extent the self-esteem, clarity in understanding lessons, trust in others in a social set up, and relationships with family members, peers, and colleagues at different phases of life a student [3].

Until recently, studies in educational fields are primarily focused on the positive impacts of teachers or effective teaching processes [4]. These studies have shown that teachers are responsible for creating a positive classroom or school experience and by nurturing learning environments teachers can create a strong teacher-student relationship. Some of those studies have emphasized that accepting the individuality of the students, addressing their diversity in a classroom from different parameters, setting goals and distributing responsibilities, and treating them with empathy, fairness and respect, teachers can create a positive learning environment for the students [5]. However, teachers' mistreatment and ill-behavior towards students have not been studied properly. Mistreatment in families, organizations, or between students has got importance in many studies, teachers' mistreatments are mostly ignored. Mistreatment of teachers is the most common and most obvious harmful behavior of teachers and the one that has profound multifarious effects on students [6].

Several reasons can be shown as the causes of the paucity of research in this field. First, emotional mistreatment is mostly understood as having feeble or most of the time no physical outlook. At the same time, the impact of emotional mistreatment is subtle. Thus, it is often seen that students are blaming themselves or the parents are blaming their children for the mistreatment of the teachers [7]. Teachers are also most of the time seen to be ignorant about their behavior or perceive their behavior as harmless or triggered by students' behaviors. Lastly, since physical punishment is completely banned in schools, it is assumed that treatments of any form are non-existing. A few studies could be referred to where the negative impacts of teachers' mistreatment have been discussed or investigated. Again, these studies have primarily focused on the immediate impacts of mistreatments on students, these have not considered the long-term impacts of mistreatments [8]. Moreover, studies on the influence of mediators like emotional intelligence are largely lacking. Research in families, communities, and organizations has proven beyond doubt that emotional intelligence may play a vital role in how mistreatments affect an individual [9]. Since it is not studied in the context of a teacher's mistreatment, this research includes emotional intelligence as a mediator of how mistreatment influences the long-term behavior of students.

The primary target of this study is to reduce the gap that exists in research on the impacts of teachers' emotional mistreatments of students and the conceivable emotional impacts in the long-run by inducting emotional intelligence as the mediator. Such study is imperative because social and psychological skills are an important development in every facet of life and for facing the challenges and well-being of the students [10].

### **EMOTIONAL MISTREATMENTS OF TEACHERS**

In professional literature, "Emotional Mistreatment" is also known as Psychological Mistreatment, Psychological Battering, Emotional Neglect, Mental Injury, or Mental Cruelty. Emotional Mistreatment can be defined as "verbal and nonverbal behaviors that do not construe any physical contact but lead to the psychological damage that could lead to physical harm as well." Emotional mistreatment of a student by their teacher is also known as "negative pedagogy" [11]. It has a larger consequence leading to negative social, somatic, emotional, and cognitive consequences in students [12].

Students facing mistreatments from teachers are not new or restricted to some part of the world. It is a widespread issue for centuries and students at all grades have been reporting such incidents regularly. The abusive behavior in different forms can be occasionally or recurring. Some students even complaining that they are facing such incidents almost daily. According to a study by [13], almost one-third of Cyprian students are reportedly experiencing emotional abuse. According to [14], more than 66% of Greek students are experiencing mental harassment. In Israeli, almost 29% of students in their primary level of schooling, and almost one-fourth of students aged between 7-11 years are experiencing different forms of ill-treatment from their teachers once a year or repetitively [15].

Emotional mistreatment includes verbal misbehavior such as denigrating statements, touches of sarcasm, or mockeries. In addition, it may include too many assignments or homework as punishment and willfully ignoring the students that are considered non-verbal misbehaviors by the teachers. In the non-

verbal category, denying necessary support, delaying such support, yelling to some targeted students are reported by many students in different parts of the world [16].

### **IMPACTS OF MISTREATMENT OF TEACHERS**

Mistreatment of teachers has traumatic effects on the normal mental and physical development of children. It is the worst school experience of most of the students who have faced such incidents regularly. Most of them even have mentioned it worse than peer abuse or bullying at school by senior students [17]. Emotional mistreatment is more harmful because it breaks the trust in the perceived relationships that students want to cherish or feel to be proud of. When emotional mistreatment takes place, trust in the teacher is despoiled in several ways. Students in such conditions pass through a tremendous sense of insecurity [18]. The problem becomes worse than perceived because it happens within that relationship where students have no scope to escape or avoid anyway.

As students face somatic stress and various psychological traumas while teachers go on mistreating them. In the schools, it hugely affects the academic performances of the students in different forms such as lack of any or poor attachment with the school, decrease in academic motivation, frequent absenteeism, decrease in cognitive resources, decrease in active participation in school's group activities, loss in interest in attending the teacher's classes or their opinions, and overall lack of interest in the study [19]. The problem as grows unnoticed or due to overall ignorance of the system causes many other issues such as loss of confidence, low self-esteem, disengagement from social activities, stressful relationship with peers, aloofness, and many more.

In comparison to studies on other forms of emotional mistreatments like families, communities, peer groups, and organizations, emotional mistreatments of teachers and their impacts on students have got little attention from researchers so far. In one study of that kind, participants aged 50-60 were asked to reply to a questionnaire on their experiences during high school days. Many participants described that period of their life as "Frozen Time" while some still feel those days are better to not remember. The study shows full of negative emotions, negative evaluations, and traumatic experiences of the then students [20].

### **TEACHER MISTREATMENTS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Experiences of people who have post mistreatment incidents are reportedly emotional and mostly reflected in various social causes. It is detected by the researchers that various social and emotional skills that harness emotional intelligence are related to emotional mistreatment in some way or the other. Mistreatments are the sources of negative emotions from sufferers and cause high level of stress that has negative impacts on the individual. [21] known for their pioneering research works on emotional intelligence, defined emotional intelligence as involving the capability to recognize and express emotions or identify and accumulate emotional knowledge or provide such knowledge to others or control the positive and negative emotions in self or others or a combination of two or more of these features. Other researchers in this field have proposed wider definitions of emotional intelligence describing it as a set of social and emotional skills that are revealed in behaviors and other types of emotional outcomes [22].

Several studies have been accomplished on the influence of emotional intelligence on different human behaviors and cognitive behavior. Again, many studies have also explored the connection between emotional intelligence and various social and familial interactions in academia where both teachers and students are involved [23]. Research findings in this field especially those related to adult behaviors and their links with the psychological health of the concerned people or how such behaviors are affected by emotional intelligence, how positive and negative attitudes are formed and how emotional intelligence affects these attitudes, how a person cope up in a stressful situation and how emotional intelligence helps them in this matter, and how the quality of social interactions are developed being influenced by emotional intelligence are also been taken into consideration in research works related to teachers' behavior in an educational institution [25]. Emotional intelligence has been found to be a key influencer in teacher-student relationships. Emotional intelligence skills in children and young adults have also been linked to a variety of

outcomes like academic achievements, enhanced social interactions, and improved learning experience are noteworthy [26].

This research work suggests that the social and emotional foundation of emotional intelligence has a specific channel that is stimulated when a teacher mistreats the students in the class. Some earlier studies in this field have focused on emotional intelligence as the key mediator or antecedent of emotional mistreatments of any form. As concerned to our study in this context and as consistent with several other studies related to emotional intelligence and emotional mistreatment, emotional intelligence can elaborately explain certain outcomes of mistreatments and why these outcomes have taken place? Thus, emotional mistreatment in childhood within the family setup leading to psychological dysfunction and emotional impairment can also be explained with the help of emotional intelligence as the moderator [27]. According to [28], specific types of childhood mistreatments and higher frequency of occurrences of those mistreatments signifies weaker existence of emotional intelligence. With the help of trait and ability models, [27] found that emotional intelligence decreases when mistreatments are frequent and vice versa. As per these findings, the hypotheses of this research are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Teacher's emotional mistreatment is correlated positively with the negative emotional effects in the long-term.

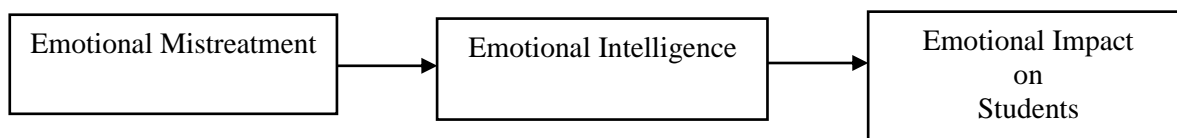
**Hypothesis 2:** Teacher's emotional mistreatment is correlated negatively with emotional intelligence.

**Hypothesis 3:** Emotional intelligence is correlated negatively with the negative emotional effects in the students in the long term.

**Hypothesis 4:** Emotional intelligence acts as a mediator in establishing the relationship between a teacher's emotional mistreatment and the negative emotional effects on the students in the long term.

### Conceptual Model

The following model (Figure 1) has been designed according to the previous research and the existing literature:



### METHOD PARTICIPANTS

In this research, the primary data was collected from 397 Muslim students studying in different university-level courses in the Northern States of Peninsular Malaysia. The respondents were between the ages 18 years to 32 years of age. The basic statistical conditions on some vital parameters are as follows: mean = 24.13, standard deviation = 5.76, median = 22.00 of the 397 respondents, 212 were BA students and the rest MA students (185). The sampling procedure is explained below.

### INSTRUMENTS

*Emotional Mistreatments by Teachers:* PMS was applied to find the nature and measure the extent of emotional mistreatment by teachers. PMS stands for Psychological Maltreatment Subscale invented by [30]. PMS contains 9 different items and designed with the self-report system. It can assess the extent of emotional experiences of students induced by teachers within an educational environment. Today's PMS is a revised version of the scale designed by [30]. The 9 items depicted 9 different events where students are asked if they think the teacher is an offender in those conditions. For example, one item goes as "The teacher yelled at me" where the measurement scale was 0-4 (0 = never and 4= 4 times or more). In the current study, the Alpha Cronbach Reliability (ACR) Coefficients were 0.83 and 0.86.

*Emotional Intelligence:* Wong and Law’s emotional intelligence scale with 16 measurement items was used for the assessment of emotional intelligence [31]. There are four emotional intelligence dimensions here, viz. one is an emotional appraisal, one’s assessment of other people’s emotional levels, Application of emotions, and Regulation of emotions. There are four items under each of these four heads. Participants in the survey were asked to mention to what extent they agreed with the statements related to the emotional intelligence of the questionnaires. There in this study, a 5-point Likert scale was used where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree. The ACR coefficients for this measurement tool range from 0.83 - 0.90 [31]. In our study, for all 16-items of the emotional intelligence questionnaires, ACR was 0.88.

*Long Term Emotional Impact:* This aspect was measured based on [32] qualitative study method. In this questionnaire is set based on long-term impact on the behavior of people for past mistreatment. [32] was originally conducted with women aged between 50-60 years who suffered in the later phases of their lives for the mistreatment of the teachers in their early school days. In this method, open-ended questions were developed using 20-items to be answered on a scale of 1 to 5 where “1” means never mistreated in the school by teachers and “5” means almost always mistreated by the teachers in the school. For example, one item in the questionnaire was “School was a trauma for me” or another item was “Till now I think that people around me will view me in the way as the teachers used to view me during those days. In this context, the Alpha Cronbach Reliability Coefficient was 0.91.

### PROCEDURE

Students pursuing diverse courses in the universities from the Northern States of Peninsular Malaysia received the links of the survey via email. The students were requested to ask their friends, family members, relatives, and close acquaintances to participate in the study. At the same time, the link to participate in the survey was distributed on Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. The participants were told that their profiles would remain anonymous. The study was sent to the Ethical Review Board for approval and it got the required approval in the due course.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis software SPSS version 25 was used for the analysis purpose. At the same time, descriptive statistics that include SD, Median, and correlation were also used for the analysis of primary data obtained through the survey. In addition, the process procedure [24] was also applied to test the quality of the mediation hypothesis of the study.

### RESULTS

Based on the analysis of data collected from 397 students (see Table 1) depicts the means, standard deviations (SD), and intercorrelations of the variable factors in the study. The intercorrelations were found to be as projected. It was significant when  $p < 0.01$ . As Table 2 shows, teacher mistreatment and long-term emotional impact were correlated at 0.61. Of the 52% (n= 210) participants in the study stated at least one such incident when they faced emotional mistreatment by a teacher within the school premises. The most stated mistreatments are selected at the end (77%), yelling directly at the student (68%), completely ignored during any group activity (43%), teachers didn’t respond when asked for help related to academic matter (71%).

**Table 1**  
**Means, standard deviation (SD), and intercorrelations for study variables**

Variable	M	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	
1. Emotional Mistreatment	0.95	0.63		0.61**		
2. Emotional Intelligence	0.93	0.62		-0.25**	-0.71**	
3. Emotional Impact on Students	0.97	0.88		0.91	0.88	0.79

Notes: N=397. 1 = emotional mistreatment, 2 = emotional intelligence, 3 = emotional impact

**Table 2**  
**Psychological mistreatment frequency reported by the students**

Psychological Mistreatment	Happened	Happened	Happened	Total Item
	1 x	2 to 3 x	> 4 x	
<i>Subscale's item</i>	%	%	%	%
1. A teacher picked me last.	22	24.7	22.3	77
2. A teacher would not help me when I asked for help.	19.1	12.5	7.4	71
3. A teacher did not allow me to be part of special activities (art, gym, recess)	12.7	4.8	1.3	18.8
4. A teacher made me stay alone, away from everyone else.	9	2.4	0.5	11.9
5. A teacher ignored me.	23.3	14.3	4.0	43
6. A teacher yelled at me.	31.3	23.1	9.8	68
7. A teacher called me names, made fun of me, or teased me in a hurtful way.	11.9	5.6	2.4	19.9
8. A teacher said mean things about my family.	5.3	0.8	0.5	6.6
9. A teacher made fun of me because of my race or the color of my skin.	3.4	1.3	0.3	5

Following are some measurements of the long-term impacts' items on the long-term emotional impact scale: Feeling Defensive – 3.56, Feeling a need to prove my worth – 3.14, Feeling that no one should find me lazy – 3.06. The above data was based on 1-5 of the long-term emotional impact scales.

By analyzing the proposed model on SPSS software [24], it was revealed that the two variable factors, i.e. mistreatment and emotional intelligence explained 20% of the discrepancy of the long-term impact with  $p < 0.001$ . A closer look at the effects of mediation showed that emotional intelligence was a vital part of the model with a confidence interval of 0.03. On the other hand, the direct effect of emotional mistreatment on the emotional impact on the long-term remained noteworthy with a 0.42 value when  $p < 0.01$ . It means emotional intelligence is a partial mediator having moderate effects.

## DISCUSSION

The key focus of the present study is to find the connection between the emotional mistreatments of teachers and the long-term emotional effects of that mistreatment? Here, emotional intelligence is taken as the mediator. On surveying 397 students in Malaysia, it was revealed that 52% of the students who participated in the survey faced mistreatments from their teachers in one way or the other during their school days. Yelled, not received any help or attention, and not picked up were some of the abuses or mistreatments the students stated. This is almost the same as we find in other studies on a similar topic but in different environments.

Concerning the first hypothesis, emotional mistreatments of teachers are positively connected with the long-term emotional impacts. This finding resembles the earlier studies in the family and social setups. According to [33], emotional mistreatment of any kind is a common relational hardship. Unwanted or unexpected behavior from the caregivers such as teachers can have an immediate adverse effect on a child and can create long-term psychological stress [34].

The second hypothesis that says mistreatment of a teacher is negatively correlated with emotional intelligence is also confirmed in the study. According to [35], stress including the stress induced by the offensive experiences has an intensive negative impact on the emotional and cognitive resources and at the

same time, it can weaken emotional intelligence. According to [37], the long-term impacts of emotional mistreatment lead to enhanced instinctive negative thoughts and reduced emotional intelligence. Several other studies have also concluded similarly. Therefore, it is possible that in a teacher-student relationship, mistreatment by teachers can act as a stressor that can weaken emotional intelligence [38].

Concerning the third hypothesis that says, emotional intelligence is correlated negatively with the negative emotional effects in the students in the long term is also supported in this study. It is evident that if emotional intelligence is strong, a person can adapt to an adverse environment quickly [39]. However, if emotional intelligence starts weakening with the continuous mistreatment, the emotional effects in the long-term on the abused individual are higher. With the increasing emotional mistreatment, emotional resources like the ability to control stress or think clearly and rationally start weakening. At the same time, childhood emotional mistreatment can damage the social cognition of a child [40]. All these are the components of emotional intelligence. If we look at it from another perspective, the weakening of emotional intelligence implies a decline in the positive emotional frequency that in turn injures a victim's ability to cope up with the adversities. There is another ill-effect of this condition. The lower level of emotional intelligence produces more negative thoughts and develops more stress that is most likely to make the victim depressed in the long term [41].

Society at large, including the parents, depend on teachers for the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive growth of children. Teachers are considered a safe and highly reliable zone for the students. This is in fact the goal of all schools around us and the goals of teachers too. Unfortunately, some teachers mistreat children leading to a phased of trauma and anxiety in the abused students [42]. This is a widespread problem in the sense that some teachers across the globe are mistreating their students in some way or the other. Our study is the first one to focus on this widespread issue. It is essential to have a clear view of the long-term impacts of teachers' mistreatments on students. It will help to explain the various unusual behavior of adults and we can also create mass awareness to reduce such incidents.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FURTHER STUDY ON THE SUBJECT**

In this context, the limitations of the research or any research works of the related fields need special mention. First, the cross-check of the study might have established the hypothesis more firmly. For example, we concluded that a teacher's mistreatment reduced emotional intelligence, but we have not checked whether the students with lower emotional intelligence are more victimized or face more long-term negative impacts. Secondly, we have undertaken the survey based on self-report measures that imply that common-method variance may have some concern over here. Since mistreatment of teachers and the reactions of the students was the focus of the study so self-report system seems appropriate for it. It is better if the future studies take a longitudinal approach making it possible to record the reactions of respondents over the passage of time and to different other aspects of their lives. Lastly, the Muslim sample was not long enough, and the respondents were selected from a single area of Malaysia. Future studies should include national-level surveys and students from other religions and diverse fields of study.

### **CONCLUSION**

A teacher's mistreatment, especially emotional mistreatment is an overlooked matter. The study shows that it has severe effects on the long-term psychological health of the students. Several studies have been done on child abuse in social, community, and family setups but the same kinds of verbal and nonverbal abuses of teachers in the school premises have remained unattained so far. Despite various limitations, this study has elaborately discussed the matter and tried to find out the connection between the emotional mistreatment of teachers and the long-term emotional effects on the children accepting emotional intelligence as the mediator. Often, the effects happen to be subliminal but can damage the emotional intelligence of the students. Several essential skills that are inherently related to a child's overall development and success later in life are damaged or lost due to such mistreatments.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Our recommendations are as follows:

- The necessity of the awareness of the issue should be understood by the school administration and they should train or aware the teachers accordingly.
- As a teacher can help a student develop a positive attitude towards life and enhance a student's emotional intelligence, the teacher training programs should understand the requirement of enhancing teachers' emotional intelligence.
- In the efforts to reduce emotional mistreatment, integrating Social Emotional Learning (SEL) can support advance resources that will guard the students against the undesirable emotional impacts of emotional mistreatments in both short-term and long-term.

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