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Approaching the relationship between emotional intelligence, burnout and academic commitment in students of compulsory secondary education

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Abstract

Introduction: In the educational process of children and adolescents in schools, there are many personal and contextual situations that significantly affect the students in their school stage. In this way, variables such as emotional intelligence, burnout and academic engagement play a fundamental role in the school life of adolescent students. The objective of this work was to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence, burnout and academic engagement in a sample of 1756 students belonging to 12 public secondary education centers.

Method: The study was composed of 1756 students belonging to 12 public compulsory secondary education (ESO) centers. The present work consisted of an ex post-facto prospective study with a simple descriptive design, responding to a simple random sampling. The instruments used were the Spanish versions of the Traid Meta-Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24), the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Student Survey (MBI-SS) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-Student (UWES-S).

Results: The results showed positive relationships between the dimensions of emotional intelligence and academic engagement in the same way that negative burnout. In add, physical and emotional exhaustion and cynicism negatively predicted emotional intelligence at the same time that vigor, dedication and absorption did it positively.

Discussion or Conclusion: The importance of the promotion of adaptive behaviors and emotional skills that improve school performance and the academic life of students in their educational centers was revealed.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; burnout; engagement; students, adolescents.

Resumen

Introducción. En el proceso educativo de niños y adolescentes en los centros escolares se producen numerosas situaciones personales y contextuales que afectan de manera significativa a los estudiantes en su proceso de formación. Variables como la inteligencia emocional, el burnout y engagement académico juegan un papel fundamental en la vida escolar de los estudiantes adolescentes. El objetivo del presente trabajo fue analizar la relación entre la inteligencia emocional, el burnout y el engagement académico en una muestra de 1756 alumnos pertenecientes a 12 centros públicos de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO).

Método. El estudio estuvo compuesto por 1756 estudiantes pertenecientes a 12 centros públicos de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO). El presente trabajo consistió en un estudio ex post-facto de carácter prospectivo con un diseño descriptivo simple, respondiendo a un muestreo aleatorio simple. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron las versiones españolas del *Traid Meta-Mood Scale-24* (TMMS-24), el *Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey* (MBI-SS) y la *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–Student* (UWES-S).

Resultados. Los resultados mostraron relaciones positivas entre las dimensiones de la inteligencia emocional y el engagement académico de la misma manera que negativas del burnout con ambas. A su vez, el agotamiento físico y emocional y el cinismo predijeron negativamente la inteligencia emocional al mismo tiempo que el vigor, la dedicación y absorción, lo hicieron de manera positiva.

Discusión y conclusiones. Se desprende la importancia de la promoción de comportamientos adaptativos y habilidades emocionales que mejoren el desempeño escolar y la vida académica de los estudiantes en sus centros educativos.

Palabras Clave: Inteligencia emocional; burnout; engagement; estudiantes, adolescentes.

Introduction

Many personal and contextual situations emerge in children's and adolescents' education process at school that strongly affect them while they learn. This is particularly true when they reach secondary education, which coincides with adolescence, a key life stage in anyone's life when personality forms before adulthood (Gómez-Fraguela, Fernández, Romero & Luengo, 2008).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is known as the ability to process information that provides us with emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), and emotionally intelligent people are those who deal with the emotions that they perceive in their own context, understand the causes and consequences they may have, and develop strategies to regulate or handle different emotional states (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2000; Pena, Rey & Extremera, 2012). In the past three decades, different conceptions of intelligence have been shaped which, when taken as a general construct, have allowed intelligence to come over as an insufficient factor to predict universal success in different areas of life. Since Gardner's multiple intelligences (1983) and the 1990s, different intelligences have been explored, such as EI, which provides and magnifies people's potentially relevant information (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008).

Nowadays, EI is made up of specific skills that play a key role in people's subjective well-being, such as attention, clarity and emotional regulation. The first, emotional attention, is defined as the capacity to suitably perceive and express feelings; emotional clarity is related to understanding emotional states; finally, emotional regulation is defined as the ability to properly regulate emotional states.

Many works in the scientific literature have studied EI in the academic domain by focusing on different contexts and populations. Most studies have centered on investigating the incidence of EI on the well-being of Primary Education (Ferragut & Fierro, 2012), Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) (Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2009) and University (Extremera, Salguero, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2011) students, or even on adult education (Vergara, Alonso-Alberca, San-Juan, Aldás, & Vozmediano, 2015) by indicating EI to be associated with their subject well-being, satisfaction with life and academic enjoyment. Hence emotions play a relevant role for students to adapt to their education center when they have to emotionally handle

all the contextual and personal variables that may emerge during the school year, and to determine such important matters like personal well-being, academic enjoyment, group socialization, academic performance, etc.

While learning at school, some students do not sporadically or persistently acquire the competences and strategies they need to meet the academic demands expected of them. This means they may note certain feelings and perceptions, like taking a negative attitude by underestimating themselves and losing interest in studying. They may also doubt their own personal capacity to conduct their studies, or may even feel physical and psychic burnout that could lead to complete demotivation, and them dropping out of studying altogether (Musitu, Giménez & Burgui, 2012). The appearance of such manifestations is called Academic Burnout (AB) syndrome (Schaufeli, Martínez, Marques, Salanova & Bakker, 2002; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007), which is characterized by three main dimensions: emotional burnout, cynicism and efficacy. The first relates to the physical exhaustion and emotional burnout that students may feel at a given time; cynicism refers to feeling indifference to or no interest in one's studies; finally, academic efficacy is linked to taking an attitude in order to perform all assigned academic tasks.

Thus AB has been related to poor academic performance (Salanova, Martínez & Llorens, 2014), high levels of stress (Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2007), low levels of self-efficacy (Durán, Extremera, Rey, Fernández-Berrocal & Montalbán, 2006) and, basically, to poor academic enjoyment when studying (Salanova, Martínez, Bresó, Llorens & Grau, 2005). Those studies that have linked EI to AB in academic populations tend to coincide in there being a negative relation between them (Durán et al., 2006). Indeed students' greater EI is negatively associated with the emotional burnout and cynicism dimensions of AB. In turn, higher EI scores positively correlate with higher academic efficacy levels (Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2007).

The last study construct, conceptualized as academic engagement (AE), is considered a psychological state that stems from positive psychology, based on an individual's strengths when faced with situations of stress and/or burnout (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Conversely to AB, AE is characterized by dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy and resistance to meet academic demands, involves making efforts, and implies persistence and rectitude when faced with any difficulties that may arise; dedication refers to being engaged in and committed to work, and also to feelings of enthusiasm about and engagement in work; finally, absorption refers to the state of being fully immersed in

a task that it meets and exceeds students' expectations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Thus AE is considered an adaptive behavioral pattern for students, characterized by being engaged in, satisfied with and performing academic activity. Several research works have evidenced an inverse relation between constructs AE and AB. Indeed the physical exhaustion/emotional burnout dimensions and cynicism that characterize AB are the opposite of the vigor and dedication dimensions that respond to AE (Salanova, Del Líbano, Llorens & Schaufeli, 2014), and are understood as opposite bipolar poles in energy categories by encompassing emotional burnout and vigor, and also identification by combining cynicism and dedication, respectively (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006).

In the academic world, scientific literature has related AE to optimum academic performance and high levels of perceived self-efficacy (Bresó, Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011), a low prevalence of dropping out of studies (Salanova et al., 2014), and generally to students' academic enjoyment and well-being (Moyano & Riaño-Hernández, 2013). Studies into AE and EI have evidenced a positive relation between both because the attention and emotional regulation dimensions have been associated with vigor and dedication, while emotional regulation has been the only one linked to the absorption dimension (Extremera et al., 2007).

In line with all this, and in accordance with Caballero, Hederich and García (2015), more studies are needed for us to better understand and know the interrelation among students' various psychological constructs of academic life, such as EI, AB and AE, in the interests of students' personal and academic development in education centers.

Objectives and hypotheses

As very few studies have directly related the constructs described in student populations, the objective of the present study is to analyze the relation linking EI, AB and AE in a sample of CSE students.

According to the above objective, three hypotheses are set out:

- (a) Students with higher prevalences for EI would be related with higher AE and with lower AB by following a more adaptive course of actions than,
- (b) Students with lower EI levels would positively relate with AB burnout by following a less adaptive course of actions and,
- (c) AB would negatively predict EI, while AE would positively predict it.

Método

Participants

This study recruited 1756 students, of whom 914 were males (52.05%) and 842 were females (47.94%). They went to 12 public CSE education centers in the province of Zaragoza (Spain), aged between 12 and 18 years ($M=14.47$; $SD=1.63$).

Table 1. *Students' ages and academic years.*

		<i>N</i>	%
<i>Age</i>	12 years	307	17.48
	13 years	293	16.68
	14 years	403	22.94
	15 years	417	23.74
	16 years	269	15.31
	17 years	56	3.18
	18 years	11	0.62
<i>Academic year</i>	1 st CSE	338	19.24
	2 nd CSE	436	24.82
	3 rd CSE	567	32.28
	4 th CSE	415	23.63

Instruments

To collect information and to work toward the proposed objective, three questionnaires were employed.

For the purpose of evaluating students' EI, a shortened version of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale-24 (TMMS-24) (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey & Pal-fai, 1995) was employed, which was adapted to the Spanish population by Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera and Ramos (2004). This scale contains three dimensions, each with eight items: emotional attention (5) ($\alpha=.89$) (e.g. "I pay a lot of attention to my feelings"); clarity of feelings (5) ($\alpha=.90$) (e.g. "I am often able to define my feelings") and emotional regulation (5) ($\alpha=.86$) (e.g. "Even when I feel bad, I try thinking about pleasant things"). Responses are answered on a Likert-type scale ranging from "Totally disagree" (1) to "Totally agree" (5). The reliability in the original instrument described Cronbach's alpha to be .87, which was .88 in the present study.

In order to measure students' AB, the Spanish version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Student Survey (MBI-SS) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was used. It survey comprises 15 items spread out over three dimensions: physical exhaustion/emotional burnout (5) ($\alpha=.81$) (e.g. “Studying or going to class all day stresses me); cynicism (4) ($\alpha=.79$) (e.g. “I am no longer enthusiastic about my studies”); efficacy (6) ($\alpha=.78$) (e.g. “Fulfilling objectives with my studies motivates me”). Answers are given in accordance with the degree of agreement or disagreement with items on a Likert-type scale ranging from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (5). The reliability in the original instrument obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .80, which was .83 in this study.

Finally, in order to evaluate students' AE, the Spanish version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale–Student (UWES-S) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was used. This instrument has 17 items divided into three dimensions: vigor (6) ($\alpha=.77$) (e.g. “My tasks as a student make me feel full of energy); dedication (5) ($\alpha=.79$) (e.g. “My studies are challenging for me”) and absorption (6) ($\alpha=.76$) (e.g. “I'm happy when I do my student tasks”). Answers range from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (5) on a Likert-type scale. The original instrument obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .80, which was .78 herein.

Procedure

In order to conduct the present study, approval was obtained from the different secondary education centers, and from the students' parents/guardians, by means of written informed consent so they could participate in this research. On the week day previously agreed on by the Head of Studies, questionnaires were completed in the classes of one same center. All the students and their parents/guardians were told about the nature of the study beforehand. Students participated on a voluntary basis. All the terms of the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (AMM, 2000) were respected at all times.

Data analysis

The descriptive statistics were carried out to obtain the sample's socio-demographic data and the different studied variables. Correlations were then made among the variables EI, AB and AE, which were processed and analyzed using v22.0 of the IBM SPSS Statistics Package. Hierarchical regression was run to estimate the prediction of the subvariables of the variables

AB and AE on EI. Significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$ and a 95% confidence level was taken into account for all operations.

Results

The results obtained from the studied variables are reported below:

Correlation analysis

As Table 2 reflects, the descriptive scores for the different variables are heterogeneous. The EI dimensions obtain higher scores than the rest, while emotional regulation is the most marked ($M=3.56$). For AB, the dimension with higher prevalences is efficacy ($M=3.52$), where cynicism is the lowest ($M=2.14$). For AE, absorption ($M=3.21$) and vigor ($M=2.75$) are respectively indicated.

When analyzing the variables EI, AB and AE, significant correlations between some of them appeared. All the EI dimensions correlated positively with the AE dimensions, and a relation between both variables was found when establishing the highest correlation between emotional regulation and dedication ($r=.42$)

Clarity and emotional regulation were negatively related with physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism for AB and along the same lines as all the AE dimensions. However, AE positively correlated with clarity ($r=.33$) and regulation ($r=.39$) for EI, and in the same way with vigor ($r=.49$), dedication ($r=.62$) and absorption ($r=.50$) for AE.

Table 2. Relation linking EI, AB and AE.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Emotional Intelligence	1. Emotional Attention	1								
	2. Emotional Clarity	.155**	1							
	3. Emotional Regulation	0.055	.451**	1						
Academic Burnout	4. Physical/emotional burnout	.100**	-.136**	-.198**	1					
	5. Cynicism	0.047	-.172**	-.251**	.328**	1				
	6. Efficacy	0.06	.331**	.388**	-.158**	-.489**	1			
Academic Engagement	7. Vigor	.082*	.301**	.369**	-.323**	-.292**	.487**	1		
	8. Dedication	.066*	.299**	.420**	-.303**	-.470**	.623**	.722**	1	
	9. Absorption	.119**	.248**	.286**	-.234**	-.330**	.500**	.709**	.707**	1
	<i>Mean</i>	3.44	3.41	3.56	3.19	2.14	3.52	2.75	3.21	2.84
	<i>SD</i>	0.75	0.72	0.75	0.96	1.06	0.77	1.02	1.02	0.9
	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	0.89	0.9	0.86	0.81	0.79	0.78	0.77	0.79	0.76

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral); * Correlation is significant at 0.05 (bilateral)

Hierarchical regression analysis

Table 3 shows the hierarchical regression analysis done to verify the possible predictive value of the AB and AE levels on EI. To do so, the EI dimensions were taken as the dependent variables, and the different AB and AE dimensions as the independent variables.

The hierarchical regression analysis results negatively predicted the physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism dimensions, which corresponded to AB, on EI. In parallel, the three AE dimensions (vigor, dedication, absorption) positively predicted the attention and emotional clarity dimensions.

Table 3. *The hierarchical regression analysis of the EI, AB and AE variables.*

<i>DV: A. physical/emotional (AB)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Emotional Attention	-.218	.047		-4.588	.000
Emotional Clarity	.155	.043		3.636	.000
Emotional Regulation	-.103	.049	.236	-2.089	.037
DV: Cynicism (AB)					
Emotional Attention	-.307	.048		-5.941	.000
Emotional Clarity	-.124	.049		-2.308	.021
Emotional Regulation	.101	.046	.269	2.174	.030
DV: Efficacy (AB)					
Emotional Attention	.305	.035		8.676	.000
Emotional Clarity	.208	.036		5.722	.000
Emotional Regulation	.014	.437	.424	.437	.663
DV: Vigor (AE)					
Emotional Attention	.396	.047		8.395	.000
Emotional Clarity	.236	.049		4.842	.000
Emotional Regulation	.040		.397	1.288	.198
DV: Dedication (AE)					
Emotional Attention	.488	.046		10.515	.000
Emotional Clarity	.189	.048		3.953	.000
Emotional Regulation	.026		.436	.849	.396
DV: Absorption (AE)					
Emotional Attention	.264	.043		6.115	.000
Emotional Clarity	.167	.045		3.713	.000
Emotional Regulation	.102	.039	.325	2.639	.008

Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this study was to analyze the relation linking EI, AB and AE in adolescent students at different education centers teaching CSE.

The first hypothesis stated that the students with higher prevalences for EI would be related with higher AE and lower AB following an adaptive course of actions.

This hypothesis was met; our research results revealed a relation linking EI and higher levels of vigor, dedication and absorption for AE, with lower levels of physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism for AB following a self-determined course of actions. Therefore, the studied students with high levels of energy, resistance and persistence paid more attention, and displayed more clarity and emotional regulation, while experiencing less physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism.

Several studies back our results when following a more adaptive course of actions. Some studies refer to higher levels of vigor and dedication linked to greater EI in Secondary Education populations (Bresó, Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2007), which are generally related to better academic performance and students being less likely to abandon their studies (Vera, Le Blanc, Taris & Salanova, 2014). Extremera, Durán and Rey (2009) refer to the attention and emotional regulation dimensions associated with vigor and dedication in detriment to AB appearing, whereas emotional regulation would be the only one linked to the absorption dimension, which agrees with our results for the first two dimensions. Palacio, Cballero, González, Gravini and Contreras (2012) found a relation between high levels of EI and AE, and indicated negative relations with physical exhaustion/emotional burnout, cynicism and poor academic performance. Pena, Rey and Extremera (2012) shared this same line as they indicated a relation with all the EI dimensions and AE, which would affect students' personal well-being and enjoyment in the interest of them making academic progress in their school lives (Moyano & Riaño-Hernández, 2013).

Our second hypothesis referred to a possible negative relation between students' EI and AB levels following a more non-adaptive course of actions, which was partially met. The correlation analysis indicated a negative relation between clarity and emotional attention with physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism, and a positive relation with academic

efficacy. Moreover, emotional attention related positively to physical exhaustion/emotional burnout.

Therefore, it stands that those students with lower levels of clarity and emotional regulation would be related to higher levels of physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism, and that both would also be related to adolescent students' emotional attention.

Some studies in the scientific literature have linked EI and AB in academic populations, and tend to coincide about them being negatively related (Durán *et al.*, 2006). Indeed students' lower EI is positively related with the AB dimensions of physical exhaustion exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism. In turn, higher EI scores positively correlate with higher academic self-efficacy levels (Blanco, 2010), as our results show.

Extremera, Durán and Rey (2007) indicate that students' lower EI is related with AB and students' academic performance. Caballero, Palacio and Hederich (2012), and Salanova *et al.*, (2014), fall in line with this by indicating that students with high levels of physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism present lower EI and worse academic performance. Finally, Salanova, Martínez and Llorens (2014) state that optimum academic performance is negatively related with AB, but positively related with EI. This means that the students who feel emotionally stable and well-balanced will experience less physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism when undertaking their academic tasks and schoolwork, which they are immersed in, than those who note the opposite (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Our third hypothesis indicated a negative prediction of AB on EI, but a positive prediction of AE on EI, and it was met. With the AB variables, physical exhaustion/emotional burnout and cynicism negatively predicted the three EI dimensions (attention, clarity and emotional regulation) appearing by following a clearly adaptive course of actions. Likewise, the three AE dimensions (vigor, dedication and absorption) positively predicted adolescent students' attention and emotional clarity.

The scientific literature contains very few studies that have specifically examined the predictive value of AB and AE on EI in an adolescent student population. Esteban (2014) indicates that the AE dimensions, as well as vigor, dedication and absorption of AB and AE, respectively, are predictors of the variable emotional clarity, exactly as our present research

results reveal, and are complemented by the variable emotional regulation. The study by Mestre, Guil and Gil-Olarte (2004) reports statistically significant predictions between EI and AE, and also for academic performance, which remain regardless of the influence that personality and general intelligence, or the combined effect of both, has on marks. Buenrostro (2012) indicates the influence and importance of the AE dimensions on students' EI, along with other variables like psychological well-being or feeling generally more satisfied with life (Buenrostro *et al.*, 2012). Finally, Carlotto and Gonçalves (2008) combine the three dimensions of AE, along with expectations of success based on the assumption that both predict EI positively and the appearance of AB in adolescent students negatively.

Thus, as shown in the present study, aspects that refer to EI, AB and AE have an influence on and play a relevant role in the conducts of adolescent students' of school age. Hence it is fundamental to deal with them to help students to accomplish optimum personal and academic development (Bresó, Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Salanova *et al.*, 2014; Vera *et al.*, 2014).

Study limitations

The study limitations include variations in the prevalences of the three studied psychological variables (EI, AE and AB) among the students surveyed during one academic year, which derived from intrinsic factors like motivation, commitment or interest, and from extrinsic factors like academic performance, classmates getting on, relationships with teachers, etc., which could affect the three studied variables in all ways and in the same academic year.

The fact that our cross-sectional design collects data at a certain spatial time point might bias what has been previously set out above.

Future prospects

It would be interesting to study other variables related to those studied herein and how they interact with them, such as students' gender, academic year or social issues. Longitudinal studies could be designed to make the temporal evaluation of the studied constructs with time as it would be interesting to check students' evolution. Finally, including a study sample that studies other levels of education (Primary, Higher Secondary or University) would be interesting to confer universality and to increase the sample size of future studies.

Practical implications

This research may imply some practical implications, like didactic strategies with students. These would be managed by teachers/school counselors that would: focus on knowledge about emotions and personal well-being; encourage efforts to partake in greater AE to the detriment of burnout by establishing guidelines to overcome it; prioritize correct academic performance. Intervention projects and/or programs could also be given by teachers in education centers to contribute to students' integral educational training to help lower the rates of students abandoning their studies early and to favour students' academic performance. Finally, our research results encourage us to keep investigating into educational psychology so we can keep making progress to help students' personal and social development improve.

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