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Research Article

Examining the relationship between preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress

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Using a relational survey design, this study examined the relationship between preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress. A total of 257 preschool teachers from public and private institutions in Istanbul participated in the study. Demographic information form, Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale-33-Tr (EIS), and Coping Responsive Inventory (CRI) were used to collect data. The results showed that preschool teachers' scores on the EIS and the CRI were not significantly affected by their age, education level, type of institution, or length of service. A positive and moderately significant relationship was found between teachers' EIS scores and their CRI total scores, as well as sub-scores for problem-solving, positive reappraisal, logical analysis, and seeking professional support. The EIS and the subscale of seeking environmental support in CRI, however, had a positive and low-level significant relationship.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence; Coping responses; Stress; Preschool teacher

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1. Introduction

In recent years, researchers have focused on the concept of emotional intelligence as a way to explain human behavior (Kgosiemang & Khoza, 2022; Pretorius & Plaatjies, 2023; Rahayu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). The first discussion of emotional intelligence was conducted by Salovey and Mayer (1990). According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), emotional intelligence is the capacity to recognize one's own emotions and those around them, to distinguish between them, and to use them to guide decisions and actions. Goleman (2005), on the other hand, describes emotional intelligence as the capacity to persevere in the face of challenges, manage mood, put off desires, take initiative, and empathize. Being able to manage one's own body language, being sensitive to other people's body language, being able to empathize, establishing positive relations with the people around, being in reconciliation-based relationships, having high emotional energy, being willing and open to change, taking other people into account, self-discipline, self-direction, coping with negative emotions, determination and coping with stress are the indicators of emotional intelligence (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020; Klapproth et al., 2020; Somuncuoğlu, 2005).

After the emotional intelligence was conceptualized, it attracted attention and studies were carried out on this subject and models for emotional intelligence were created (Fiori & Antonakis, 2011). One of the emotional intelligence models is the four-branched model of Mayer and Salovey (1997). The four branches of this model are "perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). There are five fundamental components in Goleman's notion of emotional intelligence. These are self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills. Self-consciousness includes the individuals' knowing the feelings of their own at that moment, using it in the decision-making process, objective evaluation of their own abilities and self-confidence. Taking care of oneself includes getting rid of the emotional problems, getting oneself together, and being able to control emotions in order to facilitate the work they are dealing with. Being able to empathize means understanding the emotional states of the other person and being able to look at events from his/her perspective. Motivation includes using preferences that will direct the individuals towards their goals and enable them to persevere despite feelings of failure and frustration. Social skills, on the other hand, include managing the feelings that the individuals experience in their relationships and interactions with people, and smooth interactions (Goleman, 1998). Another emotional intelligence model is the *four cornerstone model* (Cooper & Sawaf, 1998). Learning about emotions which comprises emotional honesty, energy, practical intuition, and emotional feedback, is the first cornerstone. The second cornerstone is emotional vitality. This cornerstone includes constructive discontent, self-being, flexibility, and the circle of trust. Emotional depth is the third of the four cornerstones of emotional intelligence. This cornerstone includes dedication, honesty, one's potential and purpose. Emotional alchemy, which is the last cornerstone of emotional intelligence, includes anticipating opportunities, intuitively creating the future, time and change in terms of thinking (Cooper & Sawaf, 1998). According to Bar-On (2006), emotional social intelligence refers to the socio-emotional skills that allow individuals to understand and express themselves, understand others, and deal with the demands of daily life and interpersonal relationships. This model has five components: internal, interpersonal, stress control, general mood, and adaptability (Bar-On, 2006).

It is possible to develop and strengthen emotional intelligence skills with education and training (Yeşilyaprak, 2001). At this point, teachers have great responsibilities. Teachers should be able to provide children with skills such as being aware of their feelings, respecting the feelings and thoughts of the people around them, empathizing, finding solutions to problems, and communicating effectively with the individuals around them (Dutoğlu & Tuncel, 2008). In this case, it is a necessary feature that teachers who raise future generations should have high emotional intelligence levels (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). Children who will be raised by teachers who have emotional intelligence will also grow up as individuals with emotional intelligence (Gürol, 2008).

Individuals experience stress from situations that they consider a threat to their physical or psychological health. Experienced events are the causes of stress, and the reactions of individuals are stress reactions (Atkinson et al., 1996). It is very important for the individuals to be aware of their reaction to stress. This situation enables them to understand what the stress is due to and how to deal with it (Kyriacou, 2000). There are two types of stressors: external and internal. Demands and pressures caused by the individual's family, institution, circle of friends, and the state are external stress; and the expectations and pressures that the individual has experienced within oneself are sources of internal stress. Most of the time, the internal stress source can be more effective than the others. All internal and external pressures and expectations are sources of stress (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). Rowshan addresses the symptoms of stress emotionally, spiritually, physically, socially and mentally. Emotional symptoms include frequent changes in feelings, feeling restless, depression, anger, sadness, feeling hopeless, inability to calm down, excessive crying, etc. Spiritual symptoms include feelings of emptiness, guilt, grudges, and loss of meaning in life. Physical symptoms include tremors, heart palpitations, chest pain, and insomnia, while mental symptoms include pessimism, confusion, thoughts attacking the mind, and difficulty

making decisions. Social symptoms are self-centeredness, inability to tolerate, inability to establish relationships with people around, and isolation from people (Rowshan, trans. 2020).

Since it is impossible to stay away from stress in modern life, it is necessary to learn the ability to manage stress (Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). Coping mechanisms come in two varieties: problem- and emotion-focused. It is a problem-focused method of handling the scenario or issue that the person attempts to modify the circumstance or escape from that circumstance in the future. On the other side, emotion-focused coping refers to an individual's attempts to keep the stress-related feelings at a low level, even if the circumstance cannot be changed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Stress is a fact of our lives, since it is always present in one's life. It is not possible to lead a completely stress-free life. People use various methods to cope with stress, which is the reality of their lives (Şirin, 2007). Although there is the existence of stress in every age group and in every profession, there are efforts to cope with its negative effects. In the teaching profession, teachers encounter various stress factors in the institution they work in, which can cause negative emotions. Teachers' emotional intelligence and stress management skills play a critical role in managing stress and the negative feelings that arise as a result of stress (Bechter et al., 2023).

Emotions experienced by teachers while in the classroom are important in the interaction climate of the classroom. That is, when a teacher feels unhappy, if he/she cannot control this feeling, he/she can reflect it on his/her behaviour. Negative emotions reflected in behaviours are understood and felt by children. This will affect the learning process in the classroom. Teachers with high emotional intelligence can more easily overcome negative emotions and stress situations caused by the difficulties they face in the classroom, they can establish better relationships with children, and they can give positive and emotionally constructive reactions to the problems that occur in the classroom (Sarısoy, 2017). In cases where teachers have low emotional intelligence levels, situations such as low performance, poor attitude, burnout, and stressful relationships can be seen (Shepherd, 2021). Being emotionally intelligent is crucial for managing stress. Teachers with strong emotional intelligence might also discover cope with stress (Elbir, 2022).

When looked at the studies covering emotional intelligence and emotional intelligence abroad (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2022; Dumitriu et al., 2014; Jeon & Ardeleanu, 2020; Kaufhold & Johnson, 2005; Singh & Koradia, 2017; Zekai, 2020) and in Türkiye (Arslantaş, 2016; Ata, 2010; Ertuğrul, 2020; Göçet, 2006; Gürol, 2008; Kızıl, 2012; Öztürk, 2006; Öztürk & Deniz, 2008), it can be seen that there are studies on preschool teachers, primary school teachers and teacher candidates. When looked at the studies on stress, there are a number of studies in abroad (Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Jeon & Ardeleanu, 2020; Jeon et al., 2017; Kozjak Dragčević & Opić, 2019; Li & Zhang, 2019; Živčić-Bećirević & Smojver-Ažić, 2005) and (Akalın, 2006; Biber et al., 2019; Eker, 2022; Ekici, 2017; Göçet, 2006; Gürol, 2008; Kara, 2019; Kara & Gülbahçe, 2022; Kızıl, 2012; Kolaşınlı, 2019; Ömeroğlu, 2015; Saral, 2021) in Türkiye. Regarding the investigation of the connection between preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their stress management techniques, studies have been conducted with primary school teachers (Gürol, 2008) and education faculty students, including preschool teachers (Göçet, 2006; Kızıl, 2012). However, no study has been found that looks specifically at preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and coping responses to stress. It is believed that the research will add to the body of literature because of this.

The aim of this study is to examine how preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and coping responses to stress correlate. The study also intended to investigate the emotional intelligence levels and coping responses to stress of preschool teachers in relation to age, education level, type of institution and length of employment.

For this reason, answers to the following questions were sought:

RQ 1) What are the teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress?

RQ 2) Are there statistically significant differences in teachers' emotional intelligence and their coping responses to stress depending on their age, education level, type of institution, and duration of service?

RQ 3) Is there a statistically significant relationship between teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress?

RQ 4) Do teachers' emotional intelligence levels significantly predict their coping responses to stress?

2. Method

2.1. Research Model

The relational survey model was one of the quantitative research methods used in the study. Relational survey models are a type of research model used to assess the degree or existence of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2005).

2.2. Sample

The sample of the research consists of 257 preschool teachers working in public and private education institutions in İstanbul. Participants were selected by appropriate case sampling. In appropriate case sampling, the person or group that will participate in the research can be reached more easily or participation in the research process will be easier (Ekiz, 2020). Table 1 lists the demographic details of the preschool teachers who took part in the study.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the participant group

Variable	*f*	%
Gender		
Female	247	96.1
Male	10	3.9
Total	257	100.0
Age		
21-29	119	46.3
30–39	83	32.3
40 and over	55	21.4
Total	257	100.0
Education level		
Associate degree	44	17.1
Bachelor's degree	181	70.4
Master's	32	12.5
Total	257	100.0
Institution		
Private	89	34.6
State	168	65.4
Total	257	100.0
Year of Service		
1–5	117	45.5
6–10	51	19.8
11 and over	89	34.6
Total	257	100.0

It is seen that the majority of preschool teachers are female (96.1%) and have a bachelor's degree (70.4%). It is also seen that 46.3% of the teachers are aged 21-29, 32.3% are aged 30-39, and 21.4% are aged 40 and over; and that 34.6% of them work in private and 65.4% in public institutions. Finally, 45.5% of the teachers have 1-5 years, 19.8% have 6-10 years, 34.6% have 11 years or more years of service.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

As data collection tools a demographic information form, EIS adapted to Turkish by Tatar et al. (2017), and CRI developed by Moos (1993) and adapted into Turkish by Koca Ballı and Kılıç (2016) were used.

2.3.1. Demographic information form

In the demographic information form created by the researchers, there is information about the gender, age, education level, type of institution and year of service of the preschool teachers.

2.3.2. Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale-33-tr

Adapted into Turkish by Tatar et al., (2017), EIS consists of 33 items. The scale was prepared in a five-point Likert type. There are straight and reverse items in the scale. Thirty items of the scale are straight and three items are reversed. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.86 (Tatar et al., 2017). The scale's reliability coefficient was determined to be 0.84 in this study.

2.3.3. Coping Responsive Inventory

The CRI was created by Moos in 1993 and adapted into Turkish by Koca Ballı and Kılıç (2016) for validity and reliability. It has a five-point Likert-type scale. While the original scale has two parts (avoidance and approach reactions) and eight dimensions, the "approach reactions" part and 4 dimensions are discussed in the scope of the study by Koca Ballı and Kılıç (2016). As a result of the validity and reliability study conducted by Koca Ballı and Kılıç (2016), some items were removed from the scale, which had 24 items and 4 sub-dimensions, and it was reduced to 22 items and consisted of 5 sub-dimensions. These five sub-dimensions are *problem-solving*, *positive reappraisal*, *logical analysis*, *seeking professional support* and *seeking environmental support*. In the study conducted by Koca Ballı and Kılıç (2016), the total internal consistency coefficient was found to be 0.93. Among the sub-dimensions, *problem-solving* was 0.91, while logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking professional support, and seeking environmental support were 0.91, 0.91, 0.80, and 0.73, respectively (Koca Ballı & Kılıç, 2016). In this study, the reliability coefficient of the CRI was determined as 0.82.

2.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Before any data were collected, the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Aydin University approved the study as ethically appropriate. In order to gather the research's data, Google Forms was used online. The research's participants were made informed about it at the beginning of the study, and consent for their voluntary participation was acquired.

Initially, the data collected from 275 people in total were examined, and 2 data were excluded because the items of one of the scales were not answered. Before the data analysis, the normality distribution of the scale scores was examined according to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, Skewness and Kurtosis values, coefficient of variation, histogram and detrended Q-Q plot graphics. As a result, it was determined that the data of 16 participants were extreme values and were removed from the data set. Data obtained from a total of 257 participants were evaluated for analysis. As a result, the normality distribution of the scale scores obtained from 257 data was examined. Information on the normality distribution of scale scores is given in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test significance value for scale scores is below 0.05 and indicates that the data are not in accordance with normal distribution. While the skewness value is greater than 3 in the sub-dimension of CRI, *seeking environmental support*, the skewness and kurtosis values are in the range of ±3 in all other sub-dimensions; therefore, it can be said that the dimensions other than the sub-dimension *seeking environmental support* are in accordance with

Table 2
Normality distribution of scale scores

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov					
	Statistics	*df*	*Significance*	*Skewness*	*Kurtosis*	*Variation Coefficient*
Emotional Intelligence Scale	0.071	257	0.003	2.81	0.04	0.07
Coping Responsive Inventory	0.076	257	0.001	1.07	0.69	0.09
Problem-solving	0.109	257	0.000	0.39	0.05	0.10
Positive Reappraisal	0.078	257	0.001	0.70	0.41	0.13
Logical Analysis	0.129	257	0.000	0.64	0.42	0.10
Seeking Professional Support	0.222	257	0.000	0.91	0.69	0.28
Seeking Environmental Support	0.202	257	0.000	3.57	0.09	0.22

the normal distribution. In addition, when the coefficient of variation was examined, the values were found to be less than 0.3 in all scale overall and sub-dimensions. As a result of the removal of the data including the extreme values that cause deviation from the normal distribution from the analysis, it was seen that the examined Histogram graphs were in a single peaked structure and were considered to be suitable for the normal distribution. Finally, the Q-Q plot graphs were evaluated, and it was discovered that all graphs displayed data with normal distribution (Mayers, 2013; Uysal & Kılıç, 2022). Following all of these analyses, it was decided to employ parametric tests in the data analysis because the scale scores had a normal distribution. As a consequence, binary variables were compared using the t-test, multiple variables were compared using one-way Analysis of Variance [ANOVA], and two measurement sets were examined through Pearson correlation coefficient. A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to see whether CRI of the teachers were predicted by their emotional intelligence. The significance threshold was set at 0.05.

3. Findings

In this study, which explored the connection between preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress, the results were presented and evaluated in accordance with the research questions of the study.

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Levels and Coping Responses to Stress

In Table 3, the results of the descriptive analysis of the scale scores of preschool teachers are given.

Table 3
Descriptive analysis results of preschool teachers' emotional intelligence scale and CRI scores

	n	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Emotional Intelligence Scale	257	109.00	163.00	133.49	10.54
Coping Responsive Inventory	257	67.00	108.00	85.81	8.399
Problem-solving	257	17.00	30.00	24.01	2.70
Positive Reappraisal	257	15.00	30.00	22.77	3.23
Logical Analysis	257	17.00	30.00	23.76	2.61
Seeking Professional Support	257	3.00	10.00	7.82	1.34
Seeking Environmental Support	257	2.00	10.00	7.43	1.63

In Table 3, it is seen that the teachers' average score on the EIS is 133.49. The participants' average score on the EIS is above the middle, or in other words, their emotional intelligence levels are higher than average, given that the lowest score that can be acquired from the scale is 33 and the maximum score is 165.

According to the CRI, the overall mean score was 85.81, whereas the sub-dimensions of problem-solving, positive reappraisal, logical analysis, seeking professional support, and seeking

environmental support were 24.01, 22.77, 23.76, 7.82, and 7.43, respectively. Based on the sub-dimensions of problem-solving, positive reappraisal, and logical analysis, the lowest score is 6 and the highest score is 30; and the lowest score that can be obtained from the sub-dimensions of seeking professional support and seeking environmental support is 2 and the highest score is 10, it appears that all sub-dimensions were above the mean for participants. Comparing the mean scores, it can be concluded that the highest scores were obtained in the problem-solving sub-dimension, followed by logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking professional support, and seeking environmental support. Therefore, preschool teachers cope with stress the most by solving problems and the least by seeking environmental support.

3.2. Findings on the Comparison of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Levels and Coping Responses to Stress according to Age, Education level, Type of institution and Length of service

Table 4 lists the findings of the descriptive analysis of the scale scores of the research group's by age.

Table 4
ANOVA results of EIS and CRI by age

Age variable	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Emotional Intelligence Scale					
21-29	119	133.21	11.17	0.185	.831
30–39	83	134.07	10.61		
40 and above	55	133.20	9.09		
Coping Responsive Inventory					
21-29	119	85.09	8.22	0.876	.418
30–39	83	86.63	9.11		
40 and above	55	86.12	7.63		
Problem-solving					
21-29	119	23.90	2.83	0.164	.849
30–39	83	24.09	2.80		
40 and above	55	24.10	2.24		
Positive Reappraisal					
21-29	119	22.34	3.25	2.018	.135
30–39	83	23.12	3.32		
40 and above	55	23.20	2.98		
Logical Analysis					
21-29	119	23.53	2.61	0.847	.430
30–39	83	24.00	2.84		
40 and above	55	23.89	2.23		
Seeking Professional Support					
21-29	119	7.87	1.38	0.173	.841
30–39	83	7.78	1.29		
40 and above	55	7.76	1.36		
Seeking Environmental Support					
21-29	119	7.42	1.75	1.411	.246
30–39	83	7.63	1.50		
40 and above	55	7.16	1.53		

Table 4 shows no statistically significant difference between teachers' ages and their EIS and CRI scores ($p > .05$). In other words, the age factor has no effect on preschool teachers' emotional intelligence or their ability to cope with stress.

A descriptive analysis of the scale scores according to the education levels of preschool teachers in the study group is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
ANOVA results of EIS and CRI by educational level

Education Level variable	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Emotional Intelligence Scale					
Associate	44	134.88	10.42	0.973	.379
Bachelor's	181	133.50	10.52		
Master's	32	131.46	10.85		
Coping Response Inventory					
Associate	44	87.04	9.40	1.480	.230
Bachelor's	181	85.88	8.00		
Master's	32	83.71	9.03		
Problem-solving					
Associate	44	24.61	3.05	1.928	.148
Bachelor's	181	23.97	2.57		
Master's	32	23.40	2.79		
Positive Reappraisal					
Associate	44	23.31	3.52	2.070	.128
Bachelor's	181	22.81	3.13		
Master's	32	21.81	3.28		
Logical Analysis					
Associate	44	24.09	3.42	1.639	.196
Bachelor's	181	23.81	2.32		
Master's	32	23.03	2.86		
Seeking Professional Support					
Associate	44	7.81	1.51	0.138	.871
Bachelor's	181	7.80	1.34		
Master's	32	7.93	1.16		
Seeking Environmental Support					
Associate	44	7.81	1.51	0.563	.570
Bachelor's	181	7.80	1.34		
Master's	32	7.93	1.16		

Table 5 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between preschool teachers' scores on the EIS and CRI ($p > .05$) and their degree of education. In other words, the education level variable does not affect teachers' emotional intelligence or their ability to cope with stress.

According to the type of institution they work in, Table 6 shows the *t*-test findings for the scale scores of the preschool teachers in the research group. Table 6 shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between the teachers' EIS and CRI scores and the type of institution they work in ($p > .05$). In other words, teachers' emotional intelligence levels and coping responses to stress do not differ based on the type of institution they work for.

In Table 7, the descriptive analysis results of the scale scores of the preschool teachers in the study group are given according to their years of service. The years of experience of preschool teachers does not statistically significantly differ ($p > .05$) from the scores on either of the EIS or the CRI, as shown in Table 7. Therefore, the emotional intelligence of preschool teachers and their coping responses to stress are not affected by the variable of years of experience.

Table 6
T-test results of EIS and CRI scores by institution type

Institution Type variable	n	Mean	SD	t	p
Emotional Intelligence Scale					
Private	89	134.48	10.34	1.099	.273
State	168	132.96	10.65		
Coping Response Inventory					
Private	89	86.62	8.71	1.134	.258
State	168	85.38	8.22		
Problem-solving					
Private	89	24.42	2.89	1.801	.073
State	168	23.79	2.57		
Positive Reappraisal					
Private	89	22.75	3.40	−0.091	.927
State	168	22.79	3.15		
Logical Analysis					
Private	89	23.96	2.46	0.908	.365
State	168	23.65	2.47		
Seeking Professional Support					
Private	89	8.00	1.22	1.553	.122
State	168	7.72	1.40		
Seeking Environmental Support					
Private	89	7.48	1.75	0.310	.757
State	168	7.41	1.57		

Table 7
ANOVA results of EIS and CRI by years of service

Years of Service variable	n	Mean	SD	F	p
Emotional Intelligence Scale					
1–5	117	133.87	10.83	0.196	.822
6–10	51	133.56	12.03		
11 and above	89	132.94	9.29		
Coping Response Inventory					
1–5	117	85.82	8.35	0.042	.959
6–10	51	85.52	9.51		
11 and above	89	85.95	7.85		
Problem-solving					
1–5	117	24.11	2.81	0.223	.800
6–10	51	23.82	2.99		
11 and above	89	23.97	2.37		
Positive Reappraisal					
1–5	117	22.53	3.31	1.011	.365
6–10	51	22.64	3.40		
11 and above	89	23.16	3.02		
Logical Analysis					
1–5	117	23.76	2.55	0.270	.763
6–10	51	23.54	3.10		
11 and above	89	23.88	2.39		
Seeking Professional Support					
1–5	117	7.92	1.43	0.784	.458
6–10	51	7.82	1.10		
11 and above	89	7.68	1.36		
Seeking Environmental Support					
1–5	117	7.48	1.79	1.330	.266
6–10	51	7.68	1.37		
11 and above	89	7.23	1.55		

3.3. Findings on the Relationship between Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Levels and Coping Responses to Stress

Table 8 displays the findings of the analysis demonstrating the relationship between the teachers in the research group's scores on the EIS and the CRI.

Table 8
Participants' EIS and CRI scores Pearson correlation analysis results

Coping Responsive Inventory	Emotional Intelligence Scale
Overall	0.651**
Problem-solving	0.564**
Positive Reappraisal	0.435**
Logical Analysis	0.537**
Seeking Professional Support	0.548**
Seeking Environmental Support	0.241**

*Note. **p <.001.*

The value of r less than 0.30 indicates a low correlation, between 0.30 and 0.70 indicates a moderate relationship and greater than 0.70 indicates a high degree of correlation (Roscoe, 1975, as cited in Köklü et al., 2006). From this point of view, according to Table 8, there is a moderately significant positive correlation between the scores of the preschool teachers' EIS scores and sub-dimensions CRI as well as overall score. On the other hand, there is a positive and low-level significant correlation between the scores of the EIS and the searching for environmental support sub-score of the CRI ($r = 0.241$; $p <.001$). As preschool teachers' EIS scores increase; overall, problem-solving, positive reappraisal, logical analysis, seeking professional support, and seeking environmental support seeking sub-scores of CRI also increase.

3.4. Findings related to the Predictors of Teachers' Emotional Intelligence Levels on their Coping Responses to Stress

To find out if teachers' coping responses to stress were predicted by their emotional intelligence, a simple linear regression analysis was carried out. The predicted variable coping with stress was assigned as the dependent variable. The table below contains the analysis's findings.

Table 9
Regression analysis results for the prediction of teachers' coping with stress

Variable	B	SD_B	β	t	p	Binary r	Partial r
Stable	21.850	5.153	-	4.240	.000	-	-
Emotional Intelligence	0.464	0.038	0.609	12.065	.000	0.609	0.609
R= 0.609		R^2= 0.371					
$F_{(1-247)}$=145.574		p =.000					

The correlations between the predictor and predicted dependent variables in Table 9 indicate that the emotional intelligence of teachers has a positive and moderately significant relationship with their coping with stress ($r = 0.609$). A significant relationship (R=0.609, R^2=0.371) was found between the emotional intelligence variable and teachers' coping with stress ($F_{(1-247)}$=145,574). Emotional intelligence of teachers explains 37% of their coping with stress. A one-unit increase in teachers' emotional intelligence positively affects their coping with stress by 0.61 units.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current study examined preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress. It has been determined that the average score of the teachers on EIS is 133.49. As the lowest score on the scale is 33 and the highest score is 165, it can be concluded that the emotional intelligence levels of the participants were above average. According to a literature review, there are studies that reach similar conclusions. Dumitriu et al. (2014) found that 57% of

candidate teachers, including those in the preschool teaching department, had medium emotional intelligence and 38.6% had high emotional intelligence. Zekai (2020) found that preschool teachers had high emotional intelligence levels in another study. On the other hand, Ertuğrul (2020) reported in her study that preschool teachers' emotional intelligence scores were low.

CRI mean scores for preschool teachers were 85.81 in total, 24.01 for problem-solving, 22.77 for positive reappraisal, 23.76 for logical analysis, 7.82 for seeking professional support, and 7.43 for seeking environmental support. All sub-dimensions were scored above the middle by participants. A comparison of the mean scores shows that the highest score was obtained from the problem-solving sub-dimension, followed by the logical analysis, positive reappraisal, seeking professional support, and seeking environmental support. There are studies in the literature that have reached similar conclusions. In a study by Biber et al. (2019), preschool teachers and candidate teachers had the highest average self-confidence approach to coping with stress, and the lowest average submissive approach. Study conducted by Ekici (2017) found that preschool teachers use the most *confident* approach and the least *submissive* approach to deal with stress. Similar to Ekici's (2017) study, studies conducted with candidate teachers including preschool teachers (Kara, 2019; Kara & Gülbahçe, 2022) showed that candidate teachers most often dealt with stress by using the *self-confidence* approach and the *submissive* approach the least. In the study conducted by Kolaşınlı (2019), it was found that preschool teachers suffer from stress-triggered diseases such as depression, shingles, etc. It has been determined that some teachers use antidepressants. A study conducted by Clipa and Boghean (2015) on preschool teachers found that most teachers do not consider psychological counseling or medical treatment strategies to reduce stress. Akalın (2006), on the other hand, reported that preschool teachers most often coped with stress by active planning, seeking external help, cognitive restructuring, taking refuge in religion, escaping (emotional-actional), and escaping (biochemical).

Using the age variable as a variable for the research, it was determined that emotional intelligence levels of preschool teachers are not different. Upon reviewing the literature, similar studies were found (Dumitriu et al., 2014; Ertuğrul, 2020; Gürol, 2008; Öztürk, 2006; Öztürk & Deniz, 2008). In the study by Arteaga-Cedeo et al. (2022) on preschool and primary school teachers, it was found that emotional perception levels, one of the factors of emotional intelligence, decrease with age. Ata (2010) found that teachers' ages differed in the sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence. Preschool teachers aged 26-30, who are part of the emotional intelligence sub-dimensions, had higher scores than teachers in other age groups for the personal and general mood sub-dimensions, and 20-25 years old for the interpersonal and harmony sub-dimensions. The results also show that preschool teachers between the ages of 31-35 scored higher on the stress management sub-dimension, which is one of the factors of emotional intelligence. In their study, Singh and Koradia (2017) found that early childhood care workers aged 25-35 were more emotionally intelligent than those aged 35-45. It is believed that the training and seminars received have an effect on the results in the literature. Since emotional intelligence can be developed through education, participants in studies with different results may have improved their emotional intelligence levels after taking seminars and pieces of training on emotional intelligence. Depending on the age grouping of the sample, the different results obtained in the studies may also be explained.

The EIS scores of preschool teachers in this study were not significantly affected by their education level. A literature review revealed research findings that paralleled the study's findings. Based on the study conducted by Arslantaş (2016) on preschool teachers, it was determined that the emotional intelligence of the teachers is not affected by their school of graduation. Ertuğrul (2020) determined that preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels do not differ significantly based on their educational level in another study. The literature, however, also contained studies that reached different conclusions. Compared to preschool teachers with associate and bachelor's degrees, teachers with a master's degree had higher scores in the personal skill sub-dimension of emotional intelligence, according to a study by Öztürk (2006). According to Zekai (2020), preschool

teachers who have a master's degree have higher emotional intelligence levels than preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, Kaufhold and Johnson (2005) found that teachers with a master's degree perceive themselves to have higher self-esteem and stress management skills than teachers with a bachelor's degree. In studies, education may play a role in determining results. Teachers' educational experiences, their training, and factors such as emotional awareness levels may influence the results they achieve throughout their careers.

The study showed that teachers' emotional intelligence levels did not differ based on the type of institution they work in. A literature review found no studies that included the type of institution as a variable in emotional intelligence studies for preschool teachers. The study also found that teachers' emotional intelligence levels are not affected by their years of service in the profession. Studies that reach similar results are identified in the literature (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2022; Gürol, 2008; Ertuğrul, 2020; Öztürk, 2006), but there are also studies that reach different conclusions. Based on the study conducted by Arslantaş (2016), preschool teachers with 20 years or more of experience benefit from a differentiation. Furthermore, Ata (2010) found that the seniority of preschool teachers led to the greatest difference in emotional intelligence. The scores of preschool teachers with 6-10 years of experience were higher than those of preschool teachers with other service periods in all sub-dimensions of emotional intelligence.

In the study, no significant difference was found between teachers' ages and their CRI scores. Therefore, teachers' coping responses to stress do not differ based on their age. In the study conducted by Akalın (2006) on preschool teachers, it was determined that the difference between age and coping responses to stress was not significant. In the study conducted by Biber et al., (2019) on preschool teachers and teacher candidates, it was determined that the stress coping styles of preschool teachers differed depending on their age, while the stress coping methods of preschool teacher candidates did not differ according to their age. Eker (2022) determined that preschool teachers' ways of coping with stress differed based on their age in his study. Teachers between the ages of 21-30 scored higher in each sub-dimension than teachers in other age groups. In their study of early childhood teachers, Jeon et al. (2017) found that perceived stress and age are related. Older teachers were found to have lower perceived stress levels in the study. A study conducted by Ömeroğlu (2015) found that the sub-dimension of seeking social support, one method of coping with stress among preschool teachers, was differentiated according to age. Teachers in the 20-30 age group among preschool teachers score higher in the sub-dimension of seeking social support than their counterparts in the 31-40 age group. According to the sub-dimension of problem-solving, preschool teachers do not differ based on their age. According to Saral (2021), there is no significant difference in the work stress of preschool teachers across ages. It was found in the study of Živčić-Bećirević and Smojver-Ažić (2005) that kindergarten teachers perceive interpersonal relationships as more stressful than those in the younger age groups. In contrast to what is found in the literature, the characteristics of the sample group may be effective in obtaining different results.

The study also found that preschool teachers' coping responses did not differ based on their level of education or type of institution they worked in. Akalın (2006) and Biber et al. (2019) found in their study that preschool teachers' styles of coping with stress do not differ significantly according to the school they graduated from. Eker (2022), on the other hand, concluded that preschool teachers' ways of coping with stress differ according to their education levels. Teachers with bachelor's degrees received higher scores than teachers with other education levels for each sub-dimension. According to the findings of Saral (2021), preschool teachers' graduation levels have a substantial impact on their levels of job stress. Preschool teachers with master's degrees are found to experience more work-related stress than those with only a high school diploma. Various factors, such as teachers' stress management training, their responsibility level, different ways of coping with stress, economic conditions, etc., are thought to affect results.

Preschool teachers' coping responses to stress do not differ based on how long they have been teaching. Biber et al. (2019) and Saral (2021) also found similar results. The literature review

revealed additional research with differing findings. In a study done by Eker (2022), preschool teachers' coping responses to stress differed based on their professional seniority. It has been observed that teachers with 0-5 years of professional service received higher scores in all sub-dimensions. Kozjak Dragčević and Opić (2019) concluded that teachers with more experience resist stress factors better. Živčić-Bećirević and Smojver-Ažić (2005) found that female teachers with 19–27 years of experience find interpersonal interactions to be more stressful than those with 10–18 years of experience. Research findings in the literature may differ based on factors such as teachers' job satisfaction levels, their working hours at their institutions, and the characteristics of their sample group.

Preschool teachers who participated in the study showed a positive and significant relationship between their emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress. Accordingly, as preschool teachers' emotional intelligence increases, they are more likely to encounter situations of *problem-solving*, *positive reappraisal*, *logical analysis*, *seeking professional support*, and *seeking environmental support*. This conclusion has been supported by studies in the literature. In a study conducted by Gürol (2008) on primary school teachers, it was determined that there is a significant relationship between the scores of teachers from the emotional intelligence scale and the subscales of active planning and escape abstraction, which are among the subscales of coping with stress. As the rate of preschool teachers using the *optimistic approach* and the *self-confident approach*, which are both coping responses to stress, increases, their hopelessness level decreases, according to Ekici (2017); and as the rate of their use of the *helplessness approach* increases, their level of hopelessness increases as well. Furthermore, Jeon and Ardeleanu (2020) found an association between preschool teachers' perceived stress and their strategies for regulating emotions. There is an association between depression levels of candidate teachers and their coping styles with stress according to studies on future teachers (Kara, 2019; Kara & Gülbahçe, 2022). In the study conducted by Kızıl (2012), which included preschool teaching students, there is a positive significant relationship between the emotional intelligence total scores of the students and the scores obtained from the subscales of active planning, seeking external help, and acceptance-cognitive restructuring in coping with stress. In the study conducted by the preschool teaching department by Göçet (2006), a significant relationship between *optimism*, which is one of the emotional intelligence factors, and *outside help*, *escape (biochemical)*, *taking refuge in religion*, *active planning*, and *acceptance-cognitive restructuring*, which are the attitudes of coping with stress were found. Another findings of the same study were the existence of a significant relationship between expression of emotions, which is one of the emotional intelligence factors of students, and active planning, escape (biochemical), taking refuge in religion and escape (emotional-actional). In another study on preschool teachers, Li and Zhang (2019) found that psychological capital mediates the relationship between job-related well-being and occupational stress. Stress at work negatively impacts teachers' psychological capital as well as their well-being at work.

The results of the current study revealed that teachers' emotional intelligence explains 37% of their coping with stress in a meaningful way. According to Elbir (2022), emotional intelligence affects ways of coping with stress. Several additional factors were found to predict stress when the literature was analyzed. In studies on stress, it has been determined that organizational stress sources predict coping with stress (Eker, 2022); leadership behaviors predict stress levels (Akbudak, 2010); awareness, self-sensitivity and emotion management skills predict stress symptoms (Terzioğlu, 2016; Terzioğlu & Çakır, 2020); self-compassion predicts stress coping styles (Ekşi et al., 2022); values and religiosity predict coping with stress (Ercan, 2021); humor styles predict stress coping styles (Özdemir et al., 2011); and self-esteem predicts stress coping styles (Parmaksız, 2011; Parmaksız & Avşaroğlu, 2012).

5. Limitations and Educational Implications

The purpose of this study was to examine how preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and coping responses to stress correlate. It is important to note that the research has some

limitations. Study participants were only preschool teachers in Istanbul. A study of preschool teachers working in different cities in Türkiye can increase the sample size. By including teachers from different branches, a comparative study can be conducted. It is possible to achieve different findings when the research is conducted with preschool teachers from different ethnicities and cultures. Intercultural studies may provide a broader perspective.

The study also examined preschool teachers' emotional intelligence and coping responses to stress in relation to their age, education level, type of institution, and length of employment. It may be possible to examine the emotional intelligence of preschool teachers and their coping responses to stress based on a number of factors, including their marital status, having a child, and their salary level.

Using the relational survey method, we examined the relationship between preschool teachers' emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress. Future research can examine this relationship in depth using qualitative methods. It is also possible to investigate how the emotional intelligence and stress management methods of preschool teachers affect their instruction.

Preschool teachers participating in the study were found to have a positive relationship between their emotional intelligence levels and their coping responses to stress. Preschool teachers can therefore receive seminars and in-service training on emotional intelligence and stress management.

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