

Emotional Intelligence in English Learning / Teaching from Middle School Learners' Perspective

الذكاء العاطفي في تدريس وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية من وجهة نظر تلاميذ المتوسطة

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Abstract:

The conception of teaching being confined to transmitting content knowledge of a given subject area by means of a good teaching methodology is no longer the primary concern of contemporary research or practices. At present, scholars are more likely to diverge from 'cognition' in favour of 'emotion'. Though the issue of emotions came into existence in a very remote past, at the time of the Greek philosopher Aristotle who believed that man is made of reason and emotions, researchers have taken it for granted and have left it behind for many decades. The literature reports that emotions play a significant role in the learning/teaching process. This paper attempts to shed light on 'emotional intelligence' from the perspective of the learners. A questionnaire was addressed to seventy-two Chlef middle school pupils to examine the extent to which their teachers of English are 'emotionally intelligent' in their classrooms. The results demonstrate that the large majority of the pupils view their teachers as caring, fair, respectful, and encouraging social interaction in the classroom, but few teachers are found to promote enthusiasm and motivate pupils to learn. On the other hand, an important number of pupils find their teachers angry and rude in class. The paper ends with some suggestions that may help to promote teachers' emotional intelligence as an important element of effective teaching.

Key words: Emotional Intelligence; Middle school learners of English; Teachers' classroom practices; Professional development

ملخص:

لا يبدو أن الافتراض التقليدي للتدريس الذي يقتصر على نقل معرفة المحتوى لبحال معين عن طريق منهجية تعليمية جيدة هو الشغل الشاغل للبحث المعاصر في الوقت الحالي، فمن المحتمل أن يختلف العلماء حول "المعرفة" مرجحين الكفة لصالح "العواطف".

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على الرغم من أن مسألة العواطف ظهرت إلى حيز الوجود منذ الماضي البعيد، وبالتحديد في زمن الفيلسوف أرسطو الذي اعتقد أن الإنسان مزيج من العقل والعواطف، و قد أخذها الباحثون كأمر مسلم بصحته وتركوها جانبا لعدة عقود. حتى الآونة الأخيرة حيث أكدت نتائج دراسات عالية المستوى الأهمية الكبرى للعواطف - وهو دور رئيسي يؤديه المدرسون. تحاول هذه الوثيقة إلقاء الضوء على "الدكاء العاطفي"، من خلال بحث إلى أي مدى يعتبر الأساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للتعليم المتوسط بالشلف أذكاء عاطفيا، كما تقترح بعض التوصيات التي من شأنها أن تساعد على تعزيز الذكاء العاطفي لدى الأساتذة. من أجل معرفة إلى أي مدى أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية للتعليم المتوسط بالشلف أذكاء عاطفيا، قمنا بتقديم إستبيان لـ 72 تلميذا. وأظهرت النتائج على أن أغلبية التلاميذ يعتبرون أساتذتهم لطفاء، عادلين و محترمين، لكن البعض منهم فقط يحفزون التلاميذ للتعلم. من جهة أخرى لا زال هناك عدد معتبر من التلاميذ الذين صرحوا بغضب و عنف أساتذتهم. و في الأخير ختمنا المقال بتقديم بعض المقترحات التي قد تساعد على تطوير الذكاء العاطفي لدى الأساتذة كعنصر مهم في التدريس الفعال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذكاء العاطفي، التعليم العالي في الجزائر، التطوير المهني، ممارسات الأستاذ في القسم.

1. Introduction

Despite the complexity of the teaching process, many consider the latter to be purely cognitive and restricted to good pedagogical practices that are traditionally believed to be the backbone of effective teaching. Some of these practices relate to significant knowledge of a given subject area, teachers' vocabulary and verbal skills (Stronge, 2007), and use of appropriate teaching methods and techniques. Though an avalanche of works have recently confirmed that teaching goes further to include emotional skills that are referred to by Goleman (1998) as "Emotional Intelligence", many teachers are still unaware of the emotional aspect of the teaching/ learning process. Mortiboys (2005) contended that whatever teachers' experience and expertise, without emotional intelligence, their teaching and learning methods may severely dwindle. This may engender a stressful atmosphere, including learners' frustration and conflicts between teachers and learners.

Defining emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) which is a human and humane aspect was defined by Goleman (1998: 317) as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships". The term "Emotional Intelligence" was first used in 1990 by Salovey and Mayer as a sequel to Gardner's (1983) intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences (Howard DeBusk, 2008). For many decades, researchers have taken for granted the issue of emotions, focusing more on other aspects of human beings like the cognitive one. The neglect of emotions in teaching

traces its roots to the seventeenth century, when the French philosopher René Descartes claimed the superiority of mind over body (Mortiboys 2005). His philosophy “I think, therefore I am”, based on the separation between body and mind, was strongly criticized despite its remarkable ongoing influence in Western sciences and humanities (Damasio1994). Recently, neuroscience has emphasized the role of emotions in the learning process. In line with this view, Claxton (1999, cited in Mortiboys, 2005: 1) stated that learning is “an intrinsically emotional business”.

Learners of emotionally intelligent teachers are found to be more regulated, more balanced and, therefore more effective than their counterparts. Parker (1999, cited in Peery 2004:4) advocated the use of emotional intelligence in teaching. He wrote: “The ultimate source of good teaching lies not in technique but in the identity of the teacher, in those persistent but obscure forces that constitute one’s nature”. In the same line of thought, Hargreaves et al (2010) and Mortiboys (2005) asserted that emotion-based classroom practices determine to a greater extent the success or failure of the teaching and learning process. The tremendous advantage of emotional intelligence was also highlighted by Taylor and Mac Kenney (2008: 16) who stated that “...chronic emotional stress has adverse effects on the entire body...Stressful school experiences and environments inhibit learning, while positive classroom atmospheres encourage neural connections in the brain to help children learn...”. Consistent with Taylor and Mc Kenney’s view, Hargreaves et al (2010: 559) pointed out that “Good teaching is charged with positive emotion...Good teachers aren't just well-oiled machines...They are emotional, passionate beings who fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.”

Research problem and context of the study

In spite of the significant reforms that have taken place in the Algerian educational system for the last two decades, the emotional aspect of English teaching and learning seems to have been neglected or ignored. English teaching and learning still revolve around the traditional teaching assumptions that focus on good teaching methods and knowledge of the subject content. This makes many teachers neglect or even ignore how important it is to be an emotionally intelligent teacher. It is clear that improving school teachers’ emotional (personal) intelligence is just as important as their pedagogical classroom practices. Since the area of emotional practices seems to be under- researched in Algeria, and since learners seem to suffer from over-emphasis on cognition to the detriment of emotion and affect, researching this topic seems quite timely. This paper intends to explore emotional intelligence of middle

school teachers of English in the Chlef area from the pupils' point of view. This preliminary study will be followed by a study of emotional intelligence from teachers' viewpoint.

The present study was conducted with 72 middle school learners in three middle schools of the Chlef area (Western Algeria). It is an attempt to meet the following objective: To examine, from the pupils' perspective, the extent to which middle school teachers of English behave emotionally in their classrooms

2. Method

Given the impossibility to study the whole population of middle school learners in this Western region of Algeria, a population sample of 72 pupils was used, with random sampling, which is considered as an objective method of sampling (Singh, 2006). The participants come from three different middle schools: Cherif Djebbour School, Benali Khaldi School and Salah Kiouar School, and from four different grades (first, second, third and fourth year middle school level). They are aged between 12 and 17 years.

A questionnaire was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This tool is regarded as one of the most popular data gathering tools (Gray, 2004) and the most flexible instrument that possesses several advantages in collecting both qualitative and quantitative information (Singh, 2006). The questionnaire, designed in English, then translated in Arabic for the pupils, was divided into two sections. In the first section (A), pupils were asked about their age and class/grade. The second section (B) addressed three questions to the respondents: two closed-ended questions, and one open-ended question.

Q1: When upset, does your teacher use appropriate or inappropriate language?

Q2: When you get with your teacher in the classroom, do you feel safe or threatened (anxious, under pressure, afraid, etc)?

Q3: What do your teachers do to make you feel safe or threatened?

The first two closed-ended questions were analysed quantitatively; and the third, open-ended, question, was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. To answer the third question, the teachers' behaviours were categorized according to specific features. The behaviours that make the pupils feel safe were classified according to the personal (emotional) features of effective teachers set by Stronge (2007: 23-31) which are: (1) caring; (2) fairness and respect; (3) social interactions with students; (4) promoting enthusiasm and motivating learning; (5) teaching attitudes towards the teaching profession and (6) reflective practice.

The respondents were handed the questionnaire in their classroom, and were given about thirty (30) minutes to answer the questions. For ethical considerations, the aim and nature of the research were explained to the pupils. They were told to keep their responses anonymous. This was to prevent any potential for abuse that may render the respondents become uncooperative, which then threatens the reliability and validity of subsequent research (Gray, 2004). Statistical and descriptive methods were used for the data analysis.

3. Results

This section reports the responses to the questionnaire administered to the pupils in Arabic. The responses of the respondents were provided in Arabic, and translated in English by the researcher. Percentages were used for the analysis of the pupils' answers to each question.

Question One: When upset, does your teacher use appropriate or inappropriate language?

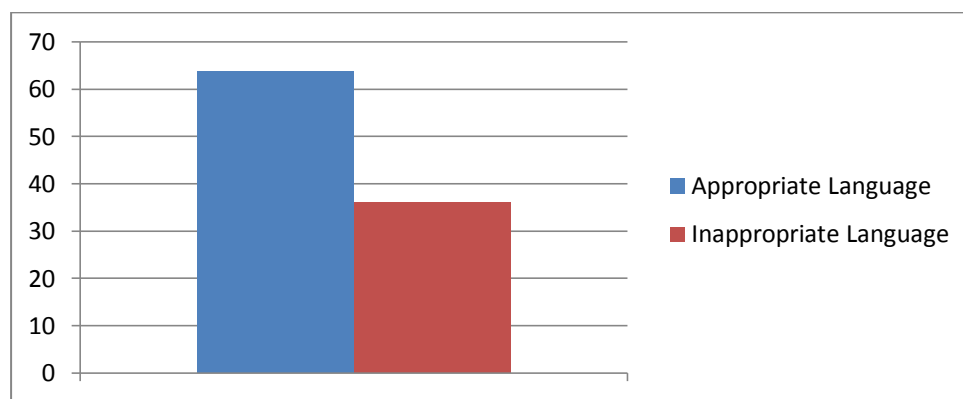


Figure 1: Type of language used by the teachers when upset.

The answers reported by 63.88% of the pupils reveal that the teachers used appropriate language. On the other hand, over 1/3 of the pupils (36.12%) answered that their teachers used inappropriate language when they get upset in class.

Question Two: When you get with your teacher in the classroom, do you feel safe or threatened (anxious, under pressure, afraid...etc)?

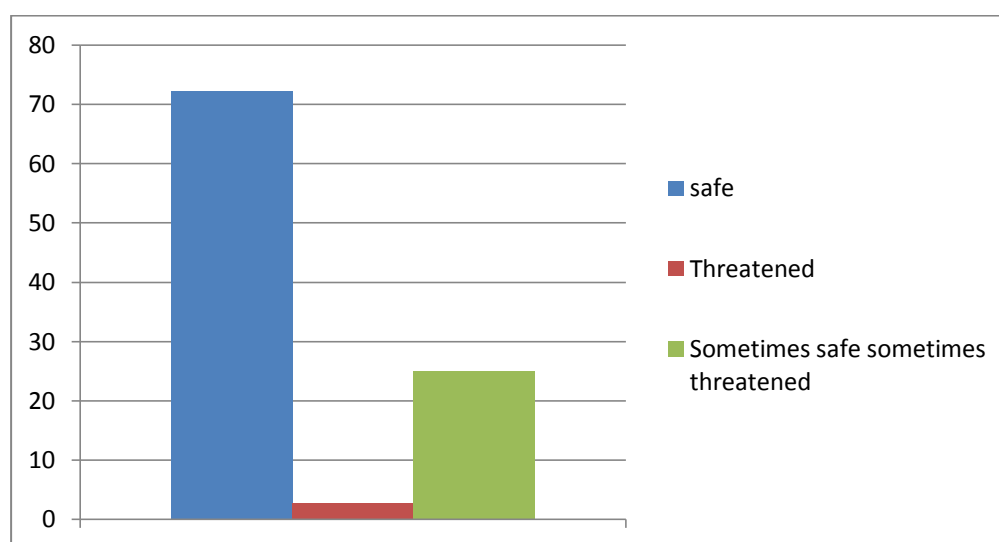


Figure 2: Pupils' feelings when they get with their teachers in the classroom

According to the results, the pupils who answered “safe” represent 72.22% of the whole population; and only 2.77% feel “threatened”. However, 25% of the pupils reported that they sometimes feel safe and sometimes threatened.

Question Three: What do your teachers do to make you feel safe or threatened?

Pupils' responses were classified according to the teachers' features provided in the questionnaire. Figure 3 below indicates that (33%) of the pupils who feel safe find their teachers caring, (31.06%) reported their teachers to be fair, and (27.18%) claimed their teachers to be good at social interaction with their learners. On the other hand, only 7.28% of the pupils stated that their teachers promote enthusiasm and motivate their learning; and finally only 1.45% described their teachers as reflective in their practices. No pupil provided any answer about the teachers' attitudes towards their profession.

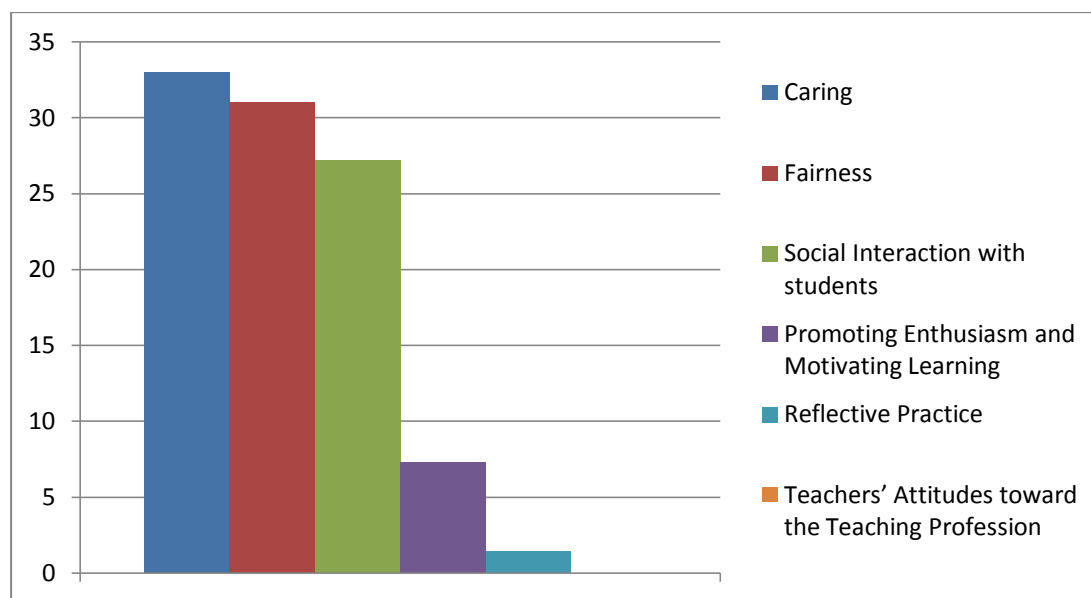


Figure 3: Teachers' behaviours that make pupils feel safe

Figure 4 below shows the responses of the learners who feel threatened in the classroom. The majority of them (78.78%) said the teachers are rude and angry in class; 6.06% responses indicate that their teachers treat pupils unequally, and finally, 3.03% of the pupils reported teachers' excessive self-esteem.

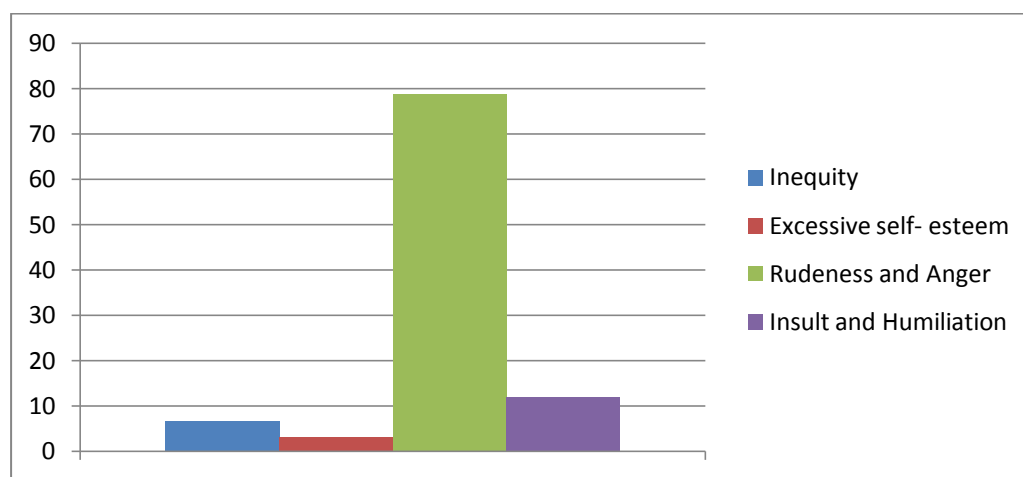


Figure 4: Teachers' behaviours that make pupils feel threatened

When asked to give details about the teachers' behaviours that make pupils feel safe or threatened, the following responses were provided.

Responses of the pupils who feel safe:

Pupils' answers revealing teachers' caring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ She supports us when we are in trouble. ➤ She cares about us. ➤ She is indulgent. ➤ She treats us like her/ his children. ➤ She makes me feel secure. ➤ She entertains us so we don't get bored with the studies. ➤ She loves us. ➤ She cares about our results. ➤ She makes me feel that she is like a mother to me. ➤ She makes us forget that she is a teacher; she is like a friend. ➤ She makes me feel at home. ➤ She protects me from harm. ➤ She builds an exceptional relationship with us. ➤ She never humiliates me. ➤ She always asks me about my health. ➤ She does not treat us like pupils but like her younger sisters and brothers. ➤ She does not shout at us. ➤ She is affectionate. ➤ I feel comfortable during her session. ➤ She soothes me when I get sick. ➤ She gives us pieces of advice. ➤ She helps her pupils outside the session.
Pupils' answers indicating their teachers' fairness and respect.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ She explains the lessons very well. ➤ She is modest. ➤ She does not hit us without due cause. ➤ She speaks to us in a pleasing way. ➤ She speaks politely. ➤ She talks gracefully. ➤ She teaches us very well. ➤ When I do not understand, she explains the lesson again.

- When she gets into the classroom, she greets us.
- She explains the lesson slowly.
- When we make mistakes, she corrects us.
- She does not discriminate, she treats us fairly.
- She does not expel us from the class.
- She does not humiliate us when we make mistakes.
- She explains in Arabic when we do not understand.

Pupils' answers suggesting their teachers' social interaction.

- She smiles to us.
- She enters in class with a smiling face.
- She is cheerful and always smiling.
- He talks about religious topics.
- She laughs with us.
- She tells jokes.
- She tells jokes most of the time, playing games or sharing their experiences.
- She talks to us.
- She tells us stories.
- He tells us that he likes sports and English.
- When explaining the lessons, he gives us proverbs useful to us.
- He tells us funny stories and those about the prophets.
- He talks about his life experience.

Pupils' answers suggesting their teachers' enthusiasm and motivation.

- She motivates us to study
- She tells us that life without studies is worthless.
- She gives us extra points.

Pupils' answers showing their teachers' reflective practices.

- His way of teaching is very methodic.

Responses of the pupils who feel threatened

Pupils' answers indicating their teachers' rudeness and anger
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When he hears someone talking, he hits them on their head. ➤ She hits us. ➤ She shouts at us. ➤ He hits girls rudely. ➤ He hits girls on their backs. ➤ When she gets angry she uses rude language.
Pupils' answers showing their teachers' insults and humiliation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ He calls us donkey and the like. ➤ He expels us from the class. ➤ She hits us and insults us.
Pupils' answers revealing their teachers' inequity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ She gives us a zero. ➤ He teaches us lessons without explanation.
Pupils' answers showing their teachers' excessive self- esteem.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ He always talks about himself and pretends being of a mystery.

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which, from the pupils' perspective, the teachers of English in the Chlef area are emotionally intelligent. The findings reveal that despite the "sink or swim" situation generated by the stressful work conditions and the pressure exerted by the administration, in addition to the scarce and inefficient professional development and professional trainings, and overcrowded classes, the teachers are viewed as 'emotionally intelligent' by a majority of pupils (72.22%). Over 1/3 of pupils (33%) describe their teachers as caring, and 31.06% see them as fair and respectful and generally make them feel safe in class. Finally, 27.18% say their teachers encourage social interaction with the learners. On this point of social interaction in teaching, Breeves (2004: 9) remarked:

“...no matter how structured the curriculum or tightly managed the school day, the interactions between students and teachers are to a large extent the result of the individual diligence, professionalism, and commitment of teachers.”

Although ‘promoting enthusiasm and motivating learning’ and ‘reflective practice’ are momentous elements in teaching, only 7.28% of the pupils’ responses reported that their teachers are enthusiastic and motivating, and only 1.45% referred to teachers’ reflective practices. In addition, despite the pupils’ positive views of their teachers overall, they provided no response to the question of the ‘teachers’ attitude toward their profession’. The absence of this feature among the pupils’ responses may have two explanations: either the teachers take its importance for granted, or they never talk about their profession with their pupils because they believe that pupils are not likely to understand professional issues. Consistently, the literature reports that teachers often ignore or are unaware of the fact that expressing their love for work and displaying positive attitudes towards teaching has a considerably positive impact on the learners (Mitchell, 1998; Stronge, 2007).

As for the pupils who feel threatened in class, 78.78% of whom claimed their teachers to be rude and angry in class, their responses may target newly recruited teachers who may not have acclimatized yet to, and are still struggling with challenging and burdensome work conditions. Though emotional intelligence, like any other competence or skill, can be developed and acquired in parallel with the professional journey that teachers travel through, coaching and mentoring are badly needed in order to accelerate this process, and, therefore, provide quality teaching that meets the standards required. On this point, Phillips- Jones (1982, cited in Caldwell and Cater, 2004: 11) remarks: “In modern-day terms, mentors are influential people who significantly help you reach your major life goals”. To highlight the importance of the emotional issue in teaching, Caldwell and Cater (op.cit.) suggest that if mentorship promotes emotional development, the trainees can then claim to have mentors of a high level.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The present study aimed to examine how a sample of 72 middle school learners view their teachers of English in relation to emotional intelligence. According to the pupils, the majority of their middle school teachers of English are aware of the role of emotions in their teaching. ‘Caring ’ and ‘fairness and respect’ were reported by 33% and 31.06% of the pupils , but ‘promoting enthusiasm and motivating learning’ and ‘reflective practice’ were reported by

only 7.28% and 3.03% of the pupils respectively ; and finally 'teaching attitudes towards the teaching profession' received no response at all. However, not only pupils, but also teachers should be questioned on their capacity to deal with learners emotionally in the classroom and to cope with difficult situations. This study is a preliminary research, but further studies are needed to highlight teachers' behaviours from their own perspective.

Grounded on the findings of the present study, one can suggest ways to promote teachers' practices that include emotional behaviours, the latter being regarded as one of the momentous factors that can decide for the success or failure of the learner. Courses on teacher professional development and teacher education can be designed, based on such behaviours. In addition, experts or more experienced teachers can mentor newly recruited teachers or less experienced ones to develop emotionally intelligent behaviours in class and act adequately when faced with different types of difficulties in class.

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Appendix: Pupils' Questionnaire

Dear Pupil,

This questionnaire is a part of a research project on English learning and teaching in middle school. Please answer the questions without writing your name. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Section A

Age:

Class:

Section B

1- When upset, does your teacher use appropriate or inappropriate language?

- ☐ Appropriate
- ☐ Inappropriate

2- When you get with your teacher in the classroom, do you feel safe or threatened (anxious, under pressure, afraid...etc)?

- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Threatened

3- What does he/she do to make you feel safe or threatened?

Safe	Threatened

THANK YOU FOR KINDLY ANSWERING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE