

Mental health and emotional self-regulation in secondary education teachers

Rosmery Cruz Gutierrez¹  Melvi Isabel Condori Juarez¹  Magui Cotrado Mendoza¹  Juan Pablo Cuentas Yupanqui¹ 
Heber Nehemías Chui Betancur¹ 

¹Universidad Nacional del Altiplano – UNAP. Puno, Perú.
E-mail: hchui@unap.edu.pe

Highlights

- Emotional self-regulation was inversely correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress.
- Stress had the greatest negative impact on emotional self-regulation.
- Anxiety ($\beta = -0.4$; $p < 0.05$) and stress ($\beta = -0.442$; $p < 0.05$) are significant predictors of emotional self-regulation.
- Socioemotional training programs may strengthen teachers' resilience.

Graphical Abstract



Abstract

The study aimed to assess the influence of emotional self-regulation on the management of depression, anxiety, and stress among secondary education teachers at the Local Educational Management Unit of Puno. It was a basic, quantitative, descriptive–correlational study with a sample of 150 secondary school teachers, using the Socioemotional Assessment Test and the DASS-21 to measure depression, anxiety, and stress. Pearson's correlation and a multiple linear regression model were applied. The research revealed a significant negative correlation among the studied variables, highlighting that stress exerts the greatest negative effect on self-regulation. It is concluded that there is indeed a relationship among the variables; moreover, teachers with higher self-regulation skills present lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Data analysis through multiple linear regression showed that nearly half of the variance in the ability to self-regulate emotions can be explained by the variables of the model ($R^2 = 0.457$). The results indicate that both anxiety ($\beta = -0.4$; $p < 0.05$) and stress ($\beta = -0.442$; $p < 0.05$) play an important role in predicting how individuals self-regulate their emotions. Conversely, depression, gender, and employment status did not demonstrate a significant influence on emotional self-regulation in this sample. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that anxiety and stress are indeed predictors of emotional self-regulation, whereas depression, gender, and employment status do not show significant influence.

Keywords: Anxiety. Self-regulation. Depression. Teachers. Stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Before the pandemic, approximately one billion people suffered from a diagnosable mental disorder, with 82% of them living in low- and middle-income nations. Furthermore, individuals with severe mental disorders had a life expectancy ten to twenty years shorter compared to the general population. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health has been affected both in individuals who were already dealing with such issues and in those who had not previously experienced them, thereby exacerbating deficiencies in health systems and existing socioeconomic inequalities. It is estimated that the pandemic led to a 25%–27% increase in the global prevalence of depression and anxiety¹. In the educational context, teachers are not exempt from this reality. When they fail to recognize their level of management of socioemotional skills and their mental health status, they exhibit difficulties in resolving classroom conflicts, show demotivation, professional burnout, and continuous fatigue, which also results in high levels of anxiety, reduced self-esteem and self-concept, as well as emotional tensions leading to depression and a variety of somatic problems². To this, the school climate is added. In this context, there is a global consensus on the need to prevent conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence through the development of socioemotional skills that facilitate harmonious relationships³. For this reason, socioemotional skills are directly related to teachers' mental health.

Socioemotional skills (SES) in teachers are behaviors that facilitate the appropriate expression of emotions and desires, thereby reducing the likelihood of institutional conflicts⁴. These skills include self-efficacy, assertiveness, autonomy, emotional awareness, effective communication, empathy, optimism, prosocial conduct, and self-regulation⁵. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)⁶, mental health is a state of psychological well-being that enables individuals to cope with stress, enhance their abilities, acquire knowledge, perform their work adequately, and integrate into their environment. Currently, mental disorders are highly prevalent across all countries, affecting approximately one in eight people worldwide. Among these disorders, stress and anxiety predominantly affect workers in diverse sectors. In the educational sector, for example, factors such as pressure, competitiveness, work overload, and the deterioration of the teacher's image are common sources of stress and anxiety, often leading to depression. For

this reason, strategies aimed at optimally developing self-regulation are implemented⁷. On the other hand, these conditions vary according to gender and age, with anxiety and depression being the most frequent disorders in both men and women. In this regard, according to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)⁸, there is evidence that the implementation of socioemotional learning programs in educational institutions is directly related to improvements in mental health in countries across different economic levels. Although there is still no definitive solution to the issue, several studies highlight the importance of self-efficacy and self-regulation in the management of teachers' occupational stress⁹.

In Peru, according to CARE¹⁰, it is essential that teachers, administrators, and the entire school structure develop their socioemotional skills, since, as agents of change in the classroom, they face the challenge of dealing with scenarios that go beyond cognitive learning. For this reason, teachers are often at risk of suffering from various mental health problems¹¹. In this context, the most recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Education¹² revealed that more than 55% of teachers experienced occupational stress, 28.4% suffered from severe anxiety, and 19.1% experienced depression. More specifically, the incidence of these conditions was higher among female teachers (59%), in contrast with 45% of their male colleagues¹³. According to ENDO¹⁴, tenured teachers are those who most frequently experience mental health problems such as stress (58.2%), anxiety (32.9%), and depression (23.7%), compared to contract teachers, who presented stress in 50.9%, anxiety in 24.7%, and depression in 15.8%. This may be related to the greater responsibilities assumed by tenured teachers, such as pedagogical guidance, coordination, and student counseling¹⁵. Given this situation, several psychological and emotional support strategies have been launched both by the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) and by the Local Educational Management Units (UGELs) and Regional Education Directorates. However, only 49% of teachers reported having received assistance aimed at the development of socioemotional competencies, while 51% stated that they had never received it. These data demonstrate that, although research has been conducted and socioemotional learning (SEL) programs have been implemented, these efforts have focused exclusively on students. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to develop more

studies and programs focused on teachers’ SES and mental health¹⁶.

In the Puno region, according to a recent study¹⁷, teachers experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, ENDO¹⁴ reported that 61.2% of teachers experienced stress, 33.2% anxiety, and 30.2% depression. Among these, 52% stated that they had received psychological and emotional support from their own educational institution, while only 5% attributed such support to the strategy “Educación te escu-

cha”, a socioemotional support service provided by the Ministry of Education of Peru for students, teachers, and families—indicating that this strategy did not have significant reach in the region. Furthermore, only 38.5% of the teaching population demonstrated mastery of emotional self-regulation, which is reflected in frustrations when facing complex institutional situations¹⁸. In this context, the main objective of the study was to identify the association between mental health and emotional self-regulation among secondary education teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted within the scope of Ugel Puno, Peru, between September and October 2024. The research followed a cross-sectional design, with a descriptive–correlational–explanatory approach. A total of 150 teachers from secondary-level educational institutions, both public and private, affiliated with Ugel Puno, participated in the study. The participants had a mean age of 41.90 ± 10.375 years, of whom 69 were women (46%) and 81 were

men (54%). Most of the teachers were younger than 42 years of age (47.3%). Regarding length of service, the average was 14.01 ± 9.758 years, with the vast majority having fewer than 24 years of professional experience (78.7%). Of the total sample, 65.3% (n = 98) were tenured teachers (*efectivos/nomeados*), and 34.7% (n = 52) were contract teachers. Among them, 65 (43.3%) worked in rural areas, while 85 (56.7%) worked in urban areas.

Table 1 - Sociodemographic and occupational characteristics of teachers.

Sociodemographic variables	M ± SD	N	%
Age	41.90 ± 10.375		
< 42 years		71	47.3
42–51 years		49	32.7
> 51 years		30	20.0
Gender			
Female		69	46.0
Male		81	54.0
Years of service	14.01 ± 9.758		
< 24 years		118	78.7
24–34 years		23	15.3
> 34 years		9	6.0
Employment status			
Contract		52	34.7
Tenured		98	65.3
Work setting			
Rural		65	43.3
Urban		85	56.7

To assess the level of management of Socioemotional Skills (SES), the instrument entitled “Socioemotional Assessment Test” was used, consisting of 15 items distributed across 5 factors: Self-awareness (I can share my emotions, feelings, thoughts, and needs with others), Self-regulation (I remember ways to regulate my emotions at school), Autonomy (When someone asks me to do something, I first consider my own well-being), Empathy (I listen attentively to others’ points of view and respectfully express whether I agree or not), and Collaboration (I collaborate with others in completing tasks and responsibilities within the required time and manner). Each factor was assessed with 3 items on a Likert scale ranging from Never (1 point) to Always (5 points). The instru-

ment demonstrated high internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.87$. This test was administered to secondary education teachers belonging to the Local Educational Management Unit of Puno. Each participant was informed about the objectives of the study, and informed consent was obtained. The application of the test took approximately 10 minutes.

To investigate the relationship between the levels of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress and the management of self-regulation as a socioemotional skill (SES), Pearson’s correlation was employed, with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$. In addition, a multiple linear regression model ($R^2 = 0.457$) was applied to identify the factors that predict levels of Self-regulation.

RESULTS

Table 2 - Correlation matrix between Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Emotional Self-regulation among teachers (2024).

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Depression (1)	–	0.899**	0.856**	-0.391**
Anxiety (2)		–	0.838**	-0.309**
Stress (3)			–	-0.425**
Emotional Self-regulation (4)				–

The analysis revealed an indirect or inverse, yet statistically significant, correlation between Self-regulation and several key factors, as shown in the correlation matrix of four psychological variables: Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Emotional Self-regulation. Below is a detailed interpretation of the relationships among these variables, along with the meaning of the correlation values. The matrix displays how each pair of variables is related through Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r). Values marked with two asterisks ($p < 0.001$) indicate that the correlations are statistically significant at the 1% level, meaning there is less than a 1% probability that the observed correlation occurred by chance.

First, the correlation between Depression and Anxiety was found to be $r = 0.899$ ($p < 0.001$), which suggests a very strong positive relationship. This indicates that, in general, higher levels of Anxiety are associated with higher levels of Depression. Because the coefficient is close to 1, it implies that individuals reporting high levels of Anxiety are also highly likely to experience high levels of Depression. Depression was also strongly correlated with

Stress ($r = 0.856$). This positive correlation suggests that elevated levels of Stress are associated with higher levels of Depression, indicating that the two variables are closely interrelated and tend to increase together. The correlation between Depression and Self-regulation was negative ($r = -0.391$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates a moderate inverse relationship, meaning that higher levels of Self-regulation are associated with lower levels of Depression. In other words, individuals with stronger emotional self-regulation skills tend to exhibit fewer depressive symptoms. Second, the relationship between Anxiety and Stress was also positive and strong ($r = 0.838$), showing that individuals who experience greater Anxiety also tend to report higher levels of Stress. This finding suggests that these two factors frequently co-occur. The correlation between Anxiety and Self-regulation was negative ($r = -0.309$; $p < 0.001$). Although this relationship is not extremely strong, it indicates that Self-regulation contributes to reducing Anxiety levels. In other words, individuals with greater capacity for Self-regulation tend to experience lower levels of Anxiety. Third, the

correlation between Stress and Self-regulation was negative and significant ($r = -0.425$; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals with stronger abilities to regulate their emotions tend to experience less Stress. Although the correlation is not as high as those between Depression, Anxiety, and Stress, it is still meaningful. Fourth, Emotional Self-regulation showed negative correlations with all three variables—Depression, Anxiety, and Stress—indicating that as Self-regulation increases, levels of these three negative emotional states decrease. The variable with the strongest negative correlation was Stress ($r = -0.425$), followed by Depression ($r = -0.391$) and, to a lesser extent, Anxiety ($r = -0.309$).

This interpretation underscores both the strength of the relationships and their order of importance

while maintaining statistical precision and clarity. The high positive correlations (e.g., Depression with Anxiety or Stress) indicate that these variables tend to manifest together, suggesting that interventions targeting one may positively affect the others. Conversely, the negative correlations with Self-regulation indicate that fostering emotional self-regulation skills can have beneficial effects in reducing negative emotional symptoms, even though the intensity of these relationships varies (Self-regulation appears more effective in reducing Stress than in reducing Anxiety).

Therefore, promoting Emotional Self-regulation may be a key component of emotional well-being, given its potential to mitigate the effects of negative factors such as Depression, Anxiety, and Stress.

Table 3 - Multiple linear regression model for the prediction of emotional self-regulation among teachers (2024).

MODEL	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval	
	B	S.E.				Lower limit	Upper limit
Depression	-0.180	0.091	-0.370	-1.976	0.050	-0.360	0.000
Anxiety	0.202	0.090	0.400	2.236	0.027	0.023	0.381
Stress	-0.212	0.072	-0.442	-2.936	0.004	-0.355	-0.069
Gender	0.216	0.334	0.049	0.647	0.519	-0.444	0.877
Employment status	0.411	0.349	0.088	1.176	0.242	-0.280	1.101

Dependent variable: Emotional Self-regulation

The multiple linear regression analysis, with an R^2 of 0.457, reveals that Anxiety ($\beta = -0.400$; $p < 0.05$) and Stress ($\beta = -0.442$; $p < 0.05$) are the most significant predictors of Emotional Self-regulation capacity. In contrast, Depression, Gender, and Employment status do not present statistically significant effects within this model. These findings have important theoretical implications, as they support the conception of Emotional Self-regulation as a process particularly sensitive to the levels of Anxiety and Stress experienced by teachers. From the perspective of the process model of emotion regulation, the daily management of emotions in response to stressful environmental demands depends more on the ability to cope with and modulate Stress and Anxiety than on

the presence of depressive symptoms or sociodemographic factors.

Furthermore, these results underscore the need to prioritize preventive and intervention strategies focused on the recognition and adaptive management of Anxiety and Stress rather than on other factors, in order to strengthen Emotional Self-regulation and thereby promote greater psychological well-being¹⁹. Finally, the absence of a significant relationship between Depression, Gender, and Employment status with Emotional Self-regulation invites further analyses into how and in which contexts these factors may exert influence, opening new lines of research that may contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of emotional regulation across different populations.

DISCUSSION

Emotional Self-regulation has been the subject of in-depth analysis, revealing its relationship with emotional states such as Anxiety and Stress among secondary school teachers¹⁹. According to the results obtained, inverse yet significant correlations were observed between Self-regulation and the three aforementioned emotional variables, highlighting patterns that invite reflection on the management of emotional well-being within the educational context. This phenomenon has both an individual and collective dimension: while each teacher experiences and regulates emotions in a unique manner, the collective emotional well-being of the teaching staff directly impacts institutional climate and the quality of the educational process. Therefore, it is essential to integrate emotional training into teachers' professional preparation, promoting both personal development and the strengthening of the educational environment²⁰.

First, the correlations observed between Depression, Anxiety, and Stress are strong and positive, consistent with existing literature that points to a high correlation between Depression and Anxiety ($r = 0.899$). This suggests that these states tend to co-occur among teachers, indicating that those with high levels of Anxiety are also likely to experience high levels of Depression. Such comorbidity may have significant implications for teachers' mental health, especially considering the professional and personal demands they face²¹. Likewise, the positive correlation between Depression and Stress ($r = 0.856$) reinforces the idea that elevated Stress levels exacerbate depressive symptoms, which can negatively affect both professional performance and overall well-being.

In contrast, the relationship between Self-regulation and these emotional variables was inverse yet statistically significant, demonstrating the protective role that Self-regulation plays against Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. The results show that higher levels of Self-regulation are associated with lower levels of Depression ($r = -0.391$), Anxiety ($r = -0.309$), and Stress ($r = -0.425$). This relationship is particularly relevant in the educational setting, as teachers with stronger emotional self-regulation skills are better equipped to cope with professional stress and to mitigate the impact of negative emotions such as Anxiety and Depression.

The multiple linear regression analysis further provides valuable insights into how each of these factors predicts the level of Self-regulation. Stress emerged as the strongest predictor, with a significant negative standardized coefficient ($\beta = -0.442$; $p = 0.004$), indicating that as Stress levels increase, Self-regulation capacity decreases considerably. This suggests that Stress exerts a particularly detrimental impact on teachers' ability to manage their emotions, with potential negative consequences for both their performance and their interactions with students.

Interestingly, the relationship between Anxiety and Self-regulation was unexpectedly positive ($\beta = 0.400$; $p = 0.027$). This suggests that, in certain cases, Anxiety may act as a motivating factor, stimulating the development and strengthening of Self-regulation capacity. Moderate levels of Anxiety may activate internal mechanisms that lead individuals to seek more effective strategies to manage emotions and behaviors, thereby promoting greater control and adaptability in challenging situations. This motivational function of Anxiety may be key to understanding how some individuals transform a potentially negative emotion into a resource for enhancing emotional well-being and performance—particularly in contexts where Self-regulation is essential, such as education and professional practice. However, this result should be interpreted with caution, as very high levels of Anxiety may compromise the ability to self-regulate, as suggested by the negative correlation observed between the two variables.

Finally, the results indicate that Depression has a negative effect on Self-regulation ($\beta = -0.370$; $p = 0.050$), confirming that teachers with depressive symptoms tend to show lower capacity to regulate their emotions. This finding is especially relevant in educational contexts, as Depression affects not only personal well-being but may also compromise teaching quality and interactions with students.

Taken together, these findings emphasize the importance of promoting interventions that strengthen Emotional Self-regulation among teachers—particularly those facing high levels of Stress, Anxiety, or Depression. Investing in psychological support programs and in the development of socioemotional skills may improve teachers' well-being while

also positively influencing the school environment by fostering higher teaching quality and a healthier institutional climate.

Moreover, it is crucial that educational institu-

tions, both urban and rural, remain attentive to teachers' mental health and create opportunities for the development and reinforcement of these emotional competencies.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study underscore the interrelationship between Emotional Self-regulation and the states of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among teachers. Strengthening Emotional Self-regulation as a socioemotional skill may serve as an effective strategy to reduce the impact of these negative emotional states, thereby promoting teachers' overall well-being and, by extension, that of their students. Suggested strategies include: Training in Socioemotional Skills (SES): Specific training programs aimed at developing competencies such as the recognition and management of emotions, resilience, and stress regulation. Psychoeducational interventions: Workshops and activities designed to teach practical techniques for Self-regulation, such as mindfulness, breathing and relaxation techniques, and cognitive management of negative thoughts.

According to the analysis presented, Stress, Anxiety, and Depression exert a significant impact on teachers' capacity to regulate their emotions, both directly and inversely. Stress: Identified as a negative predictor, indicating that higher levels of Stress reduce Self-regulation capacity. Anxiety: Although the correlation was inverse, the regression analysis revealed an unexpectedly positive relationship, suggesting that, at certain levels, Anxiety may act as a motivator to develop Self-regulation strategies. Depression: Also negatively affects Self-regulation, indicating that teachers with depressive symptoms tend to have a reduced ability to manage their emotions. These three independent variables play a crucial role in understanding how teachers manage their emotions, highlighting the urgent need for interventions focused on emotional well-being within the educational context.

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